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OUR ENGLISH

BY

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NOTE.

The five papers which make up this volume have already been published, substantially in their present form: I. and V. in Harper's Monthly Magazine; II. and III. in Scribner's Magazine; and IV. in The Christian Register.

Harvard University,
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In prose I doubt whether it be even possible to preserve our style wholly unalloyed by the vicious phraseology which meets us everywhere, from the sermon to the newspaper, from the harangue of the legislator to the speech from the convivial chair, announcing a *toast* or sentiment. Our chains rattle even while we are complaining of them. . . . Much, however, may be effected by education.—S. T. Coleridge: *Biographia Literaria* (1817).

INTRODUCTION.

While writing the essays that make up this volume, I have had steadily in mind two things: first, the difficulty which every American must find in speaking and writing his mother-tongue uniformly well; secondly, the duty which devolves upon each of us to further the cause of good English by precept or example, or both.

Among a people, like the French or the Germans, whose language is characterized by a complicated grammar, the minutiæ of grammar must be taught in the schools, and the gap between those who have mastered these minutiæ and those who have not will be wider than among a people like ours, with a language in which grammatical changes of form

are few. Thus, the very ease with which a passably correct knowledge of English may be acquired renders absolute correctness very rare.

In America, moreover, English suffers from the fact that we have no universally acknowledged tribunal—no academy, no court, no upper class—to settle disputed questions. Where every man is as good as every other man, every man's English is accounted as good as every other man's.

Hence, the ubiquity of bad English. Children hear bad English from nurses, playfellows, and, alas! from parents also. College students hear it from other college students, and now and then from teachers also; and they read it in text-books which darken counsel by words without knowledge. A clerk in a counting-room is exposed to contagion from the talk of his fellow-clerks, and from the commercial slang of business letters. A lawyer is exposed to the pedantry and the redundancy of legal documents, and to the confused statements of

garrulous clients; a minister, to the cant of deacons and the slip-slop of tea-drinkings; a doctor, a farmer, a journalist, an author, is beset by dangers peculiar to his calling. Every form of society—large or small, democratic or exclusive—has its pet variety of bad English.

To the family circle the boys and girls contribute slang of all sorts, which, far from being frowned upon by their elders, is laughed at by the father and endured by the mother. If an effort be made to improve the family English, ten to one it is not the parents who make it, but the children, eager to air, at the old people's expense, newly acquired and often inaccurate knowledge.

In general conversation, the liberty inseparable from spontaneousness and freshness of speech often degenerates into license or stiffens into affectation. In magazines and books, errors usual with hasty writers for hasty readers are imitated by those who, though themselves not pressed by time or by poverty, give currency to expressions which in their

hearts they condemn. Even among our most successful speakers and writers—successful in all senses but the highest—are some whose English is striking rather than pure; who, in the effort to say smart things, sacrifice accuracy of expression as well as truth of substance.

Of speakers or writers who have their spurs yet to win, how many resolve that they will never win them by foul means? How many enter the field in the spirit in which, during the so-called Dark Ages, a knight prepared himself for his chosen service? How many feel that it is their duty to the public and to themselves not only to state the truth as they understand it, without fear or favor, but also to state it in the very best language at their command?

So long as so few do this plain duty, so long as so many, instead of leading, are led by their inferiors, those who wish to learn how to say with clearness what they think with vigor, and who naturally look for guidance in this difficult

art to men of superior powers, are inevitably misled. When they see expressions that they have been taught to avoid stamped with the approval of a recognized authority, they naturally feel justified, not only in using these particular expressions, but also in adopting others which, though not so well supported, seem to them no more objectionable. Thus one bad example obliterates many good precepts, and the line between good and bad English is gradually obscured.

Such are some of the influences that tend to draw the lover of pure English from the strait and narrow path, in which there is plenty of room, into some one of the broad ways that are thronged by a chattering crowd.

To keep as closely as possible to this strait and narrow path is the plain duty of each of us. No one who knows how to frame a sentence with tongue or with pen but can do something in the right direction. Even the child who says "as I do" instead of "like I do," "you were" instead of "you was," "shall

I?" instead of "will I?" serves the mother-tongue. So does the young woman who never says "My partner was awful nice," or "I love caramels"; the young man whose talk never smells of stable, billiard-room, or midnight oil; the writer of school or college compositions who prefers "begin" to "commence" or "inaugurate," "coming" to "advent," "wages" to "remuneration," "farmer" to "agriculturalist," "place" to "locality," "give" to "donate," "on the carpet" to "on the *tapis*." So does the village politician whose diatribes are grammatical and pointed. So does the author of a book, of a newspaper paragraph, or of a private letter, who always writes his best. Those who have great talents and unusual opportunities as speakers or as writers can do much for the good cause: but every man, woman, and child can do something; for every word tells for good or for evil on him who utters it and on at least one other person.

There is no danger that this duty will be overdone. In every walk of life the uniformly

faithful are, and are always likely to be, in the minority. Strenuous and united efforts on the part of all who love good English are needful to preserve the treasures of our noble language and literature intact. If our classics are to remain intelligible; if Shakspere and Milton, Bacon and Addison, are still to be read with ease; if Scott and Thackeray, Cardinal Newman and Mr. Ruskin, Hawthorne and Emerson, are to be as readily understood by our children's children as by us;—we must, each in his sphere, try to keep pure the language in which they wrote.

English is, no doubt, growing, and it will continue to grow so long as it is a living language; but if the growth be really growth, and not corruption or decay, if it consist in the flowing in of fresh sap and the putting forth of new branches, it will not injure, but will preserve those parts of the old tree which are best worth preserving. Growth we cannot, if we would, arrest; but we can do something to make it healthy and vigorous.

I.

ENGLISH IN SCHOOLS.

Every child's English is affected, directly or indirectly, for better or for worse, by causes that begin to operate long before he is required to write compositions at school. The descendant of men and women who have for generations habitually spoken and written the mother-tongue with correctness and ease, will naturally use better English than the child of illiterate parents; and if he be so fortunate as to have a nurse whose language is not very faulty, a mother whose own English is pure, and who

takes pains to give a wise direction to her children's reading, play-mates who are not addicted to slang or ungrammatical expressions (if such play-mates can be imagined), and teachers who are neither prigs nor slovens in their use of words, he will, other things being equal, retain the superiority he had at birth.

Not that a well-born and carefully nurtured boy has it all his own way even in the matter of English. His ancestors may have talked or written themselves out, and have left him, like the barren fig-tree, with plenty of leaves, but no fruit. His facility with words may be a facility fatal not only to thought, but also to strength and directness of expression. A family, on the other hand,—the Carlyles or the Hawthornes, for example, —which has for generations dealt with things rather than with words, may at

length produce a great writer, in whom the wisdom long amassed in silence finds literary expression,—a writer who does not, indeed, acquire complete command of language without making exceptionally arduous exertions, but who inherits the energy and the persistency that lead to success in every undertaking.

In the matter of education too, the race may be to those who possess "staying qualities" rather than to the well-equipped, to the tortoise rather than to the hare. One boy who has all possible advantages at home and in school may fail to profit by them; another boy will feel his disadvantages so keenly, and will try so resolutely to overcome them, that he cannot but succeed—up to a certain point at least. The speech of the over-cultivated may be languidly correct and nothing more, or it may, in an un-

guarded moment, fall into errors that have the charm of forbidden fruit; the speech of the under-cultivated may abound in faults, and yet may have life and movement.

Into the hands of the teacher of English come pupils who differ thus widely from one another in everything that can be affected by birth or by early training. Since they began to talk, they have been talking English (good, bad, or indifferent), as Molière's M. Jourdain talked prose, without knowing it; but they have as yet written nothing except exercises in penmanship and spelling, and brief letters to mother or father which were read with the eyes of affection not disposed to be critical. Now, for the first time, they are asked to write an English composition.

The conditions under which they are

to write differ in different schools. Some teachers leave their pupils great freedom in the choice of topics, in order that each may be enabled to write about something that he knows and is interested in: others prescribe a subject, in order that the unpractised hand may be held close to a definite line of work: others vary their method, in order to adjust it to the individual needs of each pupil; and this, when practicable, is undoubtedly the best plan.

Whatever the method, the result is in most cases the same—failure. Even she whose talk is the life of the school at recess, writes as if she were on her good behavior at a funeral. Even he who takes the lead among his fellows in everything that requires quickness of wit, becomes insufferably dreary the instant he puts pen to paper. If the lively are

dull, and the quick-witted sluggish, when they undertake to write compositions, what must be the condition of their less clever companions? Unhappy pupils of a more unhappy teacher!

That the difficulty of which I have spoken is real, and is all but universal, will be admitted by every one who has had much to do with the compositions of beginners. Whence comes this difficulty? Can it be conquered?

What reason is there, in the nature of things, why a boy who talks well should not write well, if he can be made to use a pen as naturally as he uses his tongue,—or, in other words, to forget himself in what he is writing, as he forgets himself while talking with his playmates? Why, but because this *if* is a lion in the way? A boy must have written much before

he can form his letters without special pains; and much more before he can set down what he has to say without stumbling over punctuation, spelling, and grammar; and more still before he can write with facility.

Now, so long as a boy has to struggle at every step with difficulties connected with the mechanics of writing, it will be difficult for him to give his mind to the thing to be written, not only because his mind is otherwise employed, but also because the mental attitude of a person who is absorbed in the substance of what he is writing is entirely different from that of one who is obliged to pay attention to penmanship and other minutiæ connected with the process of putting words upon paper.

If, then, the ill success of beginners in English composition be justly attribu-

table to their inability to retain freshness and life while struggling with mechanical difficulties at every step, it follows that the methods of teaching in our schools are radically defective: for a sound method would prevent both the sacrifice of substance to form, and that of form to substance; a sound method would teach a young writer to beware both of purchasing correctness of expression by dulness, and of trying to secure interest at the cost of accuracy. Dulness is death; ignorance of elementary rules stamps a man as illiterate, and illiteracy cannot but injure the influence of the most powerful writer with cultivated readers, and, in a less degree, with uncultivated ones also.

Many teachers, however, act as if they thought it more important that a boy should spell and punctuate correctly than

that he should write an essay which it is a pleasure to read. Others, in the fear of taking the life out of a composition, pass lightly over errors in grammar, and leave spelling and punctuation to take care of themselves. Others still—and this I believe to be the most numerous class—try to achieve both objects at once, and fail of achieving either: their pupils are characterized by a mediocrity of attainment; they have ceased to be natural and spontaneous, and they are oppressed by the obligation to form their sentences correctly, but do not know how to fulfil that obligation.

Boys who have received no instruction in English composition before going to college seem to be better off, on the whole, than those who have had such instruction as is sometimes given. A boy fresh from a single reading of a

novel, for example, or from a single representation of a play of Shakspere, will, if he has been thoroughly interested in the story, tell it in his own words much better than another who has been drilled on every chapter in the novel or every scene in the play. It is possible so to treat the best books as to make them burdensome rather than interesting or stimulating to the youthful mind. I have heard of a boy who came down from his room groaning at his misfortune in having been kept in-doors by his work.

"What is the woe this time?" asked his sympathizing aunt.

"Oh, I had to read ten chapters of the 'Vicar of Wakefield.'"

In one school, a boy was expected to get three hundred pages of "Henry Esmond" into his mind within twenty-

four hours. In another school the class went through the same book at a snail's pace, the teacher doing his best to transform a lively narrative into a series of tedious exercises. Instead of calling attention to the main points of the story, to the characteristics of the principal personages, or to beauties of style, he spent his strength on unimportant details,—demanding, for example, all the particulars of the attack by the mob on the carriage of old Lady Castlewood, including an answer to the important question whether the first vegetable to hit Father Holt was a cabbage, a carrot, or a potato.

In a school of a very different class, the study of authors is made so interesting that pupils who are preparing for colleges which have no examination in English are in the habit of joining the class in this subject for their own pleas-

ure — an anomaly, I believe, in the annals of American institutions of learning.

As regards the results of the teaching of English in some of our best schools and academies, I may be pardoned for referring to my own observation. Between 1873 (when Harvard College for the first time held an examination in English) and 1884, I read several thousand compositions written in the examination-room upon subjects drawn from books which the candidates were required to read before presenting themselves. Of these a hundred, perhaps,—to make a generous estimate,—were creditable to writer or teacher or both. In 1884, Mr. (now Professor) Briggs, who then took charge of the examination, wrote to me as follows: "Few [compositions] were remarkably good, and few extraordinarily

bad; a tedious mediocrity was everywhere." *

It is this tedious mediocrity which has amazed me year after year. In spelling, punctuation, and grammar some of the compositions are a great deal worse than the mass, and some a little better; but in other respects there is a dead level, rarely varied by a fresh thought or an individual expression. Almost all the writers use the same commonplace vocabulary—a very small one—in the same unintelligent way. One year, after reading two or three hundred compositions on "The Story of 'The Tempest,'" I found my recollections of both plot and characters

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* This judgment holds good of the productions of subsequent years. See "The Harvard Admission Examination in English," by L. B. R. Briggs, in *The Academy* (Syracuse, N. Y.) for September, 1888.

so confused that I had to read the play to set myself right again.

The authors of these discouraging manuscripts may be justly regarded as the picked youth of the country. They were, almost all of them,

> "Just at the age 'twixt boy and youth,
> When thought is speech, and speech is truth."

They were all boys with blood in their veins, and brains in their heads, and tongues that could talk fast enough and to the purpose when they felt at ease. Many of them came from the best families in point of culture and breeding, and from the best schools we have. Many of them had enjoyed "The Tempest" (who that can understand it does not?), but somehow the touch of pen or pencil paralyzed their powers.

If the dreary compositions written by

the great majority of candidates for admission to college were correct in spelling, intelligent in punctuation, and unexceptionable in grammar, there would be some compensation; but this is so far from being the case that the instructors of English in American colleges have to spend much of their time and strength in teaching the A B C of the mother-tongue to young men of twenty—work disagreeable in itself, and often barren of result. Every year Harvard sends out men — some of them high scholars—whose manuscripts would disgrace a boy of twelve; and yet the college can hardly be blamed, for she cannot be expected to conduct an infant school for adults.

Is there any remedy for this state of things?

I venture to say that there is; but it is one which demands persistent and

long-continued work and hearty co-operation on the part of all who have to do with the use of English in our schools in any form and for any purpose. It requires intelligent supervision at one time, intelligent want of supervision at another time, and watchful attention constantly. It requires a quick sense of individual needs, and ready wit to provide for them as they arise.

My plan is briefly as follows:

First, I would begin as early as possible to overcome the mechanical difficulties of writing, and would use all practicable means and all possible opportunities to do so; secondly, I would not frighten a boy with "compositions" or "essays" or "themes," till he could form his sentences with tolerable correctness and use his pen with freedom; but, thirdly, when I had once set him to writing compositions,

I would keep him steadily at the work, and at the same time would make him take an interest in what he is doing, and impress him with the importance of having something to say, and of saying that something well.

First. As soon as a child has learned to form his letters without trouble, his attention should be called, not only to spelling, punctuation, and grammar, but also to the choice of words and to the construction of simple sentences; and he should be obliged to master every point that comes under the head of correctness. In this matter the instructor should not spare himself, should resist the temptation to spend time on the curiosities of language or in the pleasant places of literature, rather than in the correction of petty errors, and should constantly bear

in mind that, unless petty errors are corrected at the beginning, there is danger that they never will be.

Knowledge of conventional rules is, I am told, of incomparably less importance than the possession of those qualities in style which give a man the power to influence other men's thoughts and actions; but this remark, true enough in itself, has no application to children. In English, as in everything else, children must be taught the rudiments first. To omit them altogether, or to postpone them too long, is to act like a student in architecture who should pay no attention to questions of construction, or should take them up for the first time after he had acquainted himself with the mysteries of the so-called Queen Anne style. Such an architect might forget to leave room in his plan for a necessary

staircase, and his chimneys would surely smoke. Such a writer would be lame in his grammar, and would probably not know how to spell or to punctuate.

Not that I would, in pursuance of Mr. Benjamin F. Butler's advice, replace the spelling-book in its former commanding position in the schools, and compel boys and girls to learn long lists of words which they would have no occasion to use: but every one should be able to spell the words that are often on his lips, or often under his eye in the books he studies or reads. Not that I would perplex a young mind with punctuation as a system, or with nice questions between semicolons and colons: but every one should at an early age be taught the difference between the period and the comma, and the principal functions of each; every one should be taught,

too, the general principle that a point serves as a guide to the construction, and through the construction to the meaning of a sentence.

Above all, the time and the energies of the young should not be wasted upon formal grammar. "As he" [man], says Bacon, "hath striven against the first general Curse by the Invention of all other Arts, so hath he sought to come forth of the second general Curse, which was the confusion of Tongues, by the Art of *Grammar:* whereof the use in a mother-tongue is small, in a foreign tongue more; but most in such Foreign Tongues as have ceased to be *Vulgar Tongues*, and are turned only to *learned tongues*."

The misfortune of our schools has been that they have transferred the nomenclature and the system of the learned tongues to the mother-tongue, in which,

as Bacon truly says, the use of grammar is small. The consequence has too often been that the art which, according to Bacon, was invented to relieve man from the second general curse, has become a third curse.

Within the last few years, as we all like to believe, this curse has in a measure been lightened. Even teachers of Latin and Greek are less disposed to load the memories of boys and girls with rules and exceptions, and are giving the necessary information by the way, as it were, and in a manner that enables their pupils to perceive some relation between the facts of grammar and the language and literature studied. The best instructors in English are moving in the same direction; but few of them are moving far enough or fast enough.

Would not our schools be better off,

on the whole, if every vestige of the Lindley Murray system were swept out of them? There are teachers of English, I know, who make the study of grammar and the analysis of sentences profitable to their pupils; but how many precious hours are wasted on mere parsing, as if it were not more important for a child to understand a given sentence as a whole than to know that this word in the sentence is a noun, that word a preposition, that one an adverb of manner,—or whatever it may be called in the treatise in vogue at the moment.

Several hours judiciously used should suffice to teach an intelligent boy the few points of grammar which it is most necessary to know; for the assertion that English is "a grammarless tongue," though an exaggeration,—and a harmful one if understood literally,—has a basis in the

fact that the changes of form in English words are very few, and that the rules of syntax are far simpler in our language than in most others. A few nouns form peculiar plurals, a few verbs peculiar participles, and a very few verbs are peculiar throughout; but most of these exceptions occur in words which everybody uses so often that it is easy to learn the correct forms. A similar remark may be made concerning *who* and *whom*, *I* and *me*, and the other pronouns. Let a boy be taught to use his pronouns correctly, and to place them where there can be no doubt as to their antecedents; to couple singulars with singulars and plurals with plurals; to observe the distinction between *shall* and *will;* to put verbs referring to the same time in the same tense; not to destroy a negative by doubling it; not to interpolate adverbs be-

tween the two parts of the infinitive, as in *to blindly follow, to so say* (a common error); to insert every word that is essential to the grammar, and to strike out every word that is superfluous;—let a boy be taught these things, and he will be far on the road to correct expression.

Grammatical accuracy should, in my judgment, be taught by example rather than by precept, indirectly rather than directly. What progress there would be if all the teachers in the schools of every grade were all the time on the watch for errors!—if they never allowed one to pass, in an oral or a written exercise, in notes of lectures, in examination-books, in note-books, or even in conversation in the school-room!

In the classical schools, teachers of Greek and Latin may do much to help

the cause of good English without going out of their way, or of what should be their way. They may insist, for example, that every translated sentence, whether spoken or written, shall be a good English sentence at all points. This is done in England; and hence it is that Eton and Harrow boys, though they receive little training in their own language by itself, write better English than American boys of the same age. This is done in France; and hence it is that every educated Frenchman writes idiomatic French.

In this country too, I am happy to say, more and more attention is paid to English by teachers of other subjects. In several quarters, students in Latin or Greek, French or German, are encouraged to make translation a means of enriching their English vocabulary, and enlarg-

ing their knowledge of English idioms. The master of one academy within my knowledge does not allow his pupils to make the ordinary word-for-word translation of the Latin ablative absolute. He insists that the sentence, "Tarquin having been expelled, two consuls began to be created instead of one king," or the sentence, "No one will be about to be a thief, we being the aid," is not an English sentence, is not the English equivalent of the Latin. At least one college has, at the instance of the English instructors, inserted the following words in its statement of the requirements for admission to the Freshman Class: "The passages set for translation must be rendered into simple and idiomatic English. Teachers are requested to insist on the use of good English as an essential part of the candidate's training in transla-

tion"—a requirement which, if strictly enforced, cannot fail to tell for good upon the candidate's command of his mother-tongue.

The truth is that the study of other languages than our own, whether ancient or modern, may be so pursued as to harm the cause of good English, or so pursued as to be of great service to it. Not a few graduates of preparatory schools resemble the young man in one of Mr. James Payn's novels, "whose education had been classical, and did not, therefore, include spelling." A teacher wrote to me in grieved surprise at the failure of two of his best pupils to pass "with credit" in English composition. Re-examining the books, I discovered that each of the two boys had been guilty of a sentence like one of those quoted above—a sentence such as no English-speaking person who

had not had frequent dialogues with the dead languages would have written. On the other hand, translation may be one of the best means of improving the style and stimulating the powers of expression. It has been so used by many famous men. Rufus Choate, for example, whose command of language was unsurpassed, made a point of spending an hour or more every day in rendering into English passages from another tongue, returning sometimes day after day to the same passage, until he had succeeded in giving to his English all the merits of the original. "Translation," he is reported to have said, "should be pursued to bring to mind and to employ all the words you already own, and to tax and torment invention and discovery and the very deepest memory for additional, rich, and admirably expressive words."

Examination-books may be treated, as they are in some of our schools, not merely as tests of knowledge, but also as exercises in expression. Instead of resembling, as they too often do, the productions of an illiterate mind and an unpractised hand, instead of undoing in three hours all the good that has been gained in three weeks of instruction in English, they may be made of real service to the student by giving him practice in stating what he knows in exact and intelligible words. If he expects all his written work to be judged, in part, by the quality of his English, he will take pains to express himself correctly. To secure this result, every teacher might at least do what is done in some schools in Ohio: he might give a certain percentage of the examination marks for penmanship, neatness, and accuracy, and

might oblige every scholar to write in ink—a safeguard against slovenliness.

Correctness and clearness of expression are all that the teachers of other subjects than English can be expected to find time for: but these they should demand, in their own interest and in that of their specialty, as well as in the interest of their pupils and of the mother-tongue; for a man cannot properly be said to know a thing until he knows it well enough to be able to make a statement about it that shall be intelligible to an intelligent reader.

Somewhat more may be done by the teacher who makes it his business to examine a piece of written work as an exercise in English. He may welcome every spark of intellectual life, every picturesque phrase, every happy turn of sentence, every strong word he comes

upon, and even some expressions that, though open to criticism, are often on the boy's lips and naturally flow from his pen. He should leave free play to individuality, remembering that an opinion which is a boy's own is worth more to him than the most orthodox dogmas taken at second hand. "To sit as a passive bucket," says Carlyle, "and be pumped into, whether you consent or not, can, in the long-run, be exhilarating to no creature." Not even if the pump draws from the well of truth; and which of us can be sure that his private pump does that?

Among the things which teachers of every class should struggle against is what I must be pardoned for calling "school-masters' English"—the dialect of men and women whose business keeps them in close relations with young

minds, and who, being to a great extent cut off from intercourse with the world outside of the school-room, are apt to attribute undue importance to petty matters, to insist upon rules in cases where the best usage leaves freedom of choice, to prefer bookish and pompous ways of putting things to easy and natural ones.

In many schools, boys and girls are taught to put commas between the several parts of the address on the envelope of a letter. The rule would be correct if the words forming the address were written continuously, as in the body of a book; but the separation of each part of the address from every other part alters the question. Consequently, some of the most careful writers—following the fashion of modern title-pages and of inscriptions on monuments in public squares

and cemeteries—either put a period at the end of each line, or leave out all stops except those which mark abbreviations. Some teachers insist that the relative *that* should be used, instead of *who* or *which*, when the relative clause serves to restrict the meaning of the antecedent, and that *who* or *which* should be used, instead of *that*, when the relative clause adds something to the meaning of the antecedent, or explains it; and yet the best authorities, from Addison to Anthony Trollope, obey no such rule, but are guided by the ear in their choice between *who* or *which* and *that*. A distinction is set up in the schools between *each other* and *one another*, according as the reference is to two or to more than two persons; and yet scarcely a good author can be found who does not use the two forms interchangeably. Another article

of the school-master creed holds that a sentence should never end with a preposition,—as if the most idiomatic writers, the writers easiest and most agreeable to read, did not abound in such sentences.

In the cases that have been mentioned, the best usage is against the school-masters; but even when there is a question between two forms of expression, usage being almost equally divided, a teacher will do well to postpone discussion of the disputed point till his pupils have mastered those parts of the language on which good writers are agreed.

Still another danger of teachers springs from their disposition to set an undue value on the slavish reproduction by pupils of what they have heard from the desk. The writing-master calls that the best "chirography" which most nearly

resembles his own "copper-plate," flourishes and all; the elocutionist rates most highly the pupil who succeeds best in imitating his master's tones and gestures; and the teacher of English too often has most praise for sentences that resemble his own—particularly if they are free from all faults except that of having no merits. No system is more likely than this to arrest the growth of a young mind and to stunt its powers of expression; for "frigid correctness," in the words of Cherbuliez, "is the bane of all art."

Worst of all forms of school-master English are those that come from unwillingness to call a spade a spade.

"I have been trying for years," said a school-girl, the other day, "to say 'I *rose* at seven,' instead of *got up*—*got* is such a horrid word!"

"Do you say *retire* instead of *go to bed?*"

"Oh yes: I have been taught to avoid common expressions."

That is to say, this innocent young girl had been taught to despise the words of daily life, and to affect the vulgar finery and sham delicacy characteristic of those who talk about *culinary department*, *hymeneal altar*, *caskets for the remains of the departed*, *author of my being*, *maternal relative*, *patrons of husbandry*, *potables*, *nether extremities*, or *lower limbs*—that part of the person which is referred to in the rule of a seminary quoted in Longfellow's "Kavanagh," the rule which forbade the young ladies to "cross their *benders*." *

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* After reading this paper, on its first appearance, the author of "The Confessions of a Frivolous Girl" "dropped into" verse, as follows:

It is not well-bred persons who are ashamed to use the brief, simple, definite,

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(*After reading Prof. A. S. Hill's article on "English in the Schools," in* HARPER'S MONTHLY *for June.*)

IMMODESTY.

I am a modest little maid,
 Who thinks it more polite
To bid a man "good-evening,"
 Than bid a man "good-night."
And when the human members
 Are spoken of by him,
I always call what doctors call
 "A leg" "a lower limb."

I am a modest little maid,
 Who never goes to bed;
But to my chamber I "retire"
 Most properly instead.
And when the chaste Aurora
 Unseals my sleepy eyes,
The act which some call "getting up"
 I designate "to rise."

I never speak of feeling "sick,"
 But always say I'm "ill."
And being in my dressing-gown,
 I style "*en dishabille.*"
In fact I always hesitate
 To call a spade a spade,
Because, you see, I try to be
 A modest little maid.

ROBERT GRANT.

ordinary words which naturally come to the lips. It is not the writers of leaders in our best newspapers, but the penny-a-liners, the reporters of fires and police items, who have the fondness for vague words and tawdry circumlocutions which gives rise to the "elegant" diction of teachers like Mrs. General in "Little Dorrit," as displayed in her conversations with Miss Fanny, her pupil.

"'They wouldn't have been recalled to our remembrance, I suspect, if uncle hadn't tumbled over the subject.'

"'My dear, what a curious phrase!' said Mrs. General. 'Would not "inadvertently lighted upon," or "accidentally referred to," be better?'

"'Thank you very much, Mrs. General,' returned the young lady. 'No; I think not. On the whole, I prefer my own expression.'

"This," continues Dickens, "was always Miss Fanny's way of receiving a suggestion from Mrs. General. But she always stored it up in her mind, and adopted it at another time."

A teacher very different from Mrs. General was the master of the school (Christ's Hospital) where Lamb and Coleridge were taught. Of him Coleridge says, "In our own English compositions (at least for the last three years of our school education), he showed no mercy to phrase, metaphor, or image unsupported by a sound sense, or where the same sense might have been conveyed with equal force and dignity in plainer words. *Lute*, *harp*, and *lyre*, *Muse*, *Muses*, and *inspirations*, *Pegasus*, *Parnassus*, and *Hippocrene*, were all an abomination to him. In fancy I can almost hear him now exclaiming, 'Harp?

harp? lyre? Pen and ink, boy, you mean! Muse, boy, Muse? Your nurse's daughter, you mean! Pierian spring? Oh ay! the cloister pump, I suppose.'"

It was this same master, hostile to the sham-classical as he was, who moulded Coleridge's taste in both ancient and modern literature, and taught him sound principles of criticism in poetry.

Secondly. I would not require a boy or a girl to write a formal composition until the elementary difficulties of work with the pen shall have been in a great measure overcome. If good English has been treated from the very beginning of school-life, not as a thing by itself, but as part and parcel of every study in which the mother-tongue is used, whether orally or in writing; if the pupil has been taught to regard skill

in the use of his own language as an essential of scholarship, without which a so-called educated man, however extensive his knowledge of books, must be deemed a learned dunce; if he has been accustomed to write, not for the sake of writing, but in order to put what he knows on a given subject into a portable form; if he has written so often and so much as to have overcome the difficulties connected with the manual labor of penmanship; if his errors in spelling have never been allowed to pass uncorrected, and his memory has been forced by constant exercise to master the arbitrary forms of words that are in ordinary use; if he has been made to see that the rules of punctuation and grammar, though to a certain extent arbitrary, are for the most part helps to the accurate and prompt communication

of thought from one mind to another, and that a like principle, as carried out in practice by the best authors, underlies all rules which determine the choice, the number, and the order of words in any piece of writing;—if, in short, a pupil has been led gradually and incidentally to acquaint himself with the rudiments of good English, more will have been done towards teaching him the art of composition than could have been accomplished by the writing of essays on topics outside of his regular studies—essays which would have been burdens to him, because clear additions to his usual tasks, and bugbears, because so infrequent that he did not get used to them.

This, which may be called the indirect method of teaching the rudiments of English, has one decided advantage over the direct method, in addition to those al-

ready mentioned. The English of an examination-book or of a translation appears to the pupil to be, as it really is, a means to an end, like the English he talks on the playground or at an evening party. The English of a boy's formal essay, on the contrary, may be, and often is, merely words that serve no purpose, and seem to him to serve none, except that of filling the prescribed number of pages. At an examination, his knowledge of the facts on which each question is based supplies material for his sentences, and the questions on the paper direct him in the use of that material; in the formal essay he has, or thinks he has, nothing to say on the subject given out, and he is usually supplied with nothing definite to guide his mind and steady his steps. "Scholars in Universities," says Bacon, "come too

soon and too unripe to Logic and Rhetoric, arts fitter for Graduates than Children and Novices: for these two, rightly taken, are the gravest of Sciences, being the Arts of Arts; the one for Judgment, the other for Ornament: and they be the Rules and Directions how to set forth and dispose matter; and, therefore, for minds empty and unfraught with matter, and which have not gathered that which Cicero calleth *Sylva* and *Supellex*, stuff and variety, to begin with those Arts (as if one should learn to weigh, or to measure, or to paint the Wind) doth work but this effect, that the wisdom of those Arts, which is great and universal, is almost made contemptible, and is degenerate into childish sophistry and ridiculous affectation. And further, the untimely learning of them hath drawn on, by consequence, the superficial and un-

profitable teaching and writing of them, as fittest, indeed, to the capacity of children."

Thirdly. Compositions, when they are required, should be written so often as to form an important part of school work. So far as is possible under the conditions of the school, they should be made to flower naturally out of that part of each pupil's life in which he is most at home, be it work or play. He should be made to understand that the essential part of an essay is thought, well-organized and well-expressed; that to comprehend clearly and to feel strongly what one has to say are the indispensable conditions of making others comprehend and feel it. A boy should never sit down to write until he has substantially settled his course of thought; but when he does

begin, he should give his whole mind to the work of expressing his ideas in language that can be easily understood.

A wise teacher of English will try to make his pupils put their real selves behind the pen, and keep them there. Anxious not to do anything that shall cramp the free play of individual talent, he will at first be careful to let some elementary faults pass unnoticed; for "many a clever boy," as Scott says in his diary, "has been flogged into a dunce, and many an original composition corrected into mediocrity." A wise teacher will give special attention to the acquirement of unity and flow, the qualities which belong to a *composition*, as distinguished from a disorderly and inharmonious collection of words.

To the end of unity, the pupil should be taught that each of his sentences must

contain one, and but one, proposition,—that is, must say but one thing,—stated as briefly and plainly as is consistent with clearness and fulness of statement, and that each must be so framed as to carry on the thought from what precedes to what follows; that each of his paragraphs must deal with a single part of the subject in hand, and be made up of sentences which belong together by virtue of their common relation to that part; that a new paragraph must begin when a new division of the subject is entered upon, and that this new paragraph must contain that which comes next in order of thought to the paragraph it follows. If there is method in the arrangement of the words in a sentence, of the sentences in a paragraph, and of the paragraphs in an essay, the essay as a whole will mean something,

if the writer has a meaning, and something definite.

One good way of teaching a boy how to find out what is, and what is not, in his own essay is to have him make an abstract of it in ten lines. He will either fail to do so because there is nothing to make an abstract of, or he will succeed, and in succeeding will discover how to rearrange his materials, if they need rearrangement, so as to call order out of chaos. If a would-be fine writer can open his eyes to the fact that his essay has no body, he is likely to find something to say next time. If a confused writer can be made to bring the meaning of one of his obscure sentences into light, he will express himself more clearly in future; for he will perceive that he has gained by the change, in space as well as in perspicuity. In writ-

ing, as in house-keeping, to have a place for everything is to save time, temper, and work for all concerned.

Unity of composition may be furthered by the practice of prescribing definite subjects for essays, and of insisting that pupils shall confine themselves to the exact subject prescribed. The inevitable result of giving out a vague subject is a vague and confused piece of writing, or a composition like those of two school-girls of whom I heard the other day. Being required to write upon Friendship, they put their heads together with a view to the production of essays that should represent their united efforts, and should at the same time differ from each other. One began thus: "There are two kinds of friendship." The other opened in a more stately style: "Friendship may be regarded as consisting of two kinds or

varieties." What can a girl or a boy find to say on Friendship, or on a subject like those given in an English book on composition recently published,—"Home Rule;" "The Channel Tunnel;" "What is Poetry? Expound this subject by obverse illustration"—?

Ask a girl or a boy to write about poetry, or punctuality, or perseverance, or consistency, and she or he will write about and about it—about the word, that is to say, not stopping to define it, but repeating it over and over again, and saying things more or less distantly connected with it, in the order in which they occur to the memory; for the mind can hardly be said to take part in the exercise.

He or she will do somewhat better if asked to write on subjects like the following: "One should learn to like poetry

early;" "The punctual man wastes more time than the unpunctual;" "Genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains;" "Consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds;"—will do better because each of these texts contains an assertion which may be sustained or refuted by argument, that is, by well-ordered thought. The difficulty, however, with topics of this class is that they cannot be satisfactorily discussed without more information than children possess. Even if the teacher supplies the requisite knowledge, boys and girls will not take so much interest in such subjects as they take in facts obtained at first hand, or in arguments which they have themselves thought out. They may attain unity; but it will be a unity in form rather than in substance, the unity of a manufactured article, not that of a natural product.

Subjects should be concrete as well as definite, and should be adapted to the age and experience of those who are to write upon them. A teacher should be so well acquainted with the minds of his pupils that he knows what interests or can be made to interest them, and should choose his subjects in the light of that knowledge, being careful, at the same time, to confine each topic within narrow limits. If a boy has been greatly interested in an industrial exhibition, he may be asked to give, not a general account of the show,—a demand which would result either in a flight of superlatives or in a reproduction of the catalogue,—but a full and precise account of one thing he has seen, of the latest form of type-writer or of sewing-machine, for example. If he has been reading Irving's "Sketch Book" with pleasure, he may

be asked to compare Christmas as he knows it in his own home with Christmas as it used to be in England, or to tell the story of Rip Van Winkle as he would tell it if he were trying to amuse a younger brother. What Carlyle wrote to a young man who talked of writing a criticism on Shakspere will hold good in the case of every boy or girl. "The thing," said Carlyle, "he will have the chance to write entertainingly upon will be something he specially himself has seen, not probably Shakspere, I should say, which all the world these two centuries has been doing its best to see."

The essential thing in the subject for a boy's composition is that it should be one which his mind will take hold of, as it takes hold of a game of ball or a story-book. To put him at his ease, he may at first be required to write in his own

words the substance of something read or told to him, or he may be allowed to dictate his compositions; for as a rule he is more natural when speaking than when writing, keeps to the point more closely, and gets along more rapidly.

Next in importance among the qualities which a teacher should strive to infuse into the writings of his pupils is that known in the text-books under different names (as flow, ease, elegance, beauty, music, harmony, euphony, smoothness), the quality which renders written words agreeable to the ear and the taste, the quality which is possessed in a pre-eminent degree by Addison and Goldsmith among the dead, and by Cardinal Newman and Mr. Ruskin among the living. This excellence may be purchased—as it is in some of the histories of Irving or of Prescott—at the cost of brevity and

vigor. Its absence may be made up for (with some readers at least) by picturesqueness and strength, as in Carlyle's "Latter-Day Pamphlets;" but even those papers are hard reading for many on account of their deficiencies in this respect. Similar deficiencies, unrelieved by equal merits, greatly diminish one's pleasure in reading some of the works of Sir Arthur Helps; and they are fatal to the perusal of many books of science by any one but a specialist.

I will not say that the text-books on rhetoric ought to give more space than they do to this element of a good style: for, even if it were possible, it would in many cases be inexpedient to train the ear by precepts; were euphony insisted on, young writers might be tempted to sacrifice force to elegance, sense to sound. The teacher of English should, however,

recommend novices in composition to read authors distinguished for a flowing style, and should call their attention to chosen examples of the best work of such authors. He should point out to his pupils passages in their own compositions that are obscure or ineffective, because of clumsiness in a form of expression, or want of ease in a transition, or inharmoniousness in the collocation of words. A young writer should be made to understand that, to have unity in the fullest sense, an essay must have movement as well as method, and that any interruption in the flow of language is a source of difficulty and of irritation to the reader, since it calls his attention from the meaning of a sentence to the words which compose it, or from the line of thought in a paragraph to the particles which fasten the sentences together.

Pupils should be taught that, to be sure of having movement in their compositions, they must have it in themselves. A writer who stops at the end of every sentence to bite his pen, or to stare at the ceiling, or to talk with a visitor, will never acquire a flowing style. He who is not interested in his own work has small chance of interesting others; he who keeps interrupting himself can hardly expect that his readers will find continuity in what he has written.

Before sitting down to write, a boy should have thought out what he has to say, and should have arranged it in an orderly manner, so that there shall be a beginning, a middle, and an end; when he does sit down at his desk, he can and he should write at a heat. Then, if ever, words will follow words, and sen-

tences sentences, and paragraphs paragraphs, naturally and with ease. If between a first draught thus produced—after thought and with speed—and the finished composition, sufficient time shall elapse to enable him to forget a large part of what he has written, so much the better; for he will then approach his work like a stranger, and will see, as a stranger would see, where he has failed to express clearly or vigorously what he has tried to say. Lapse of time and change of mood are excellent critics.

Finally, the teacher of English composition should give to each of his pupils enough but not too much help, should be to each a staff, not a crutch. To correct every error is almost as bad as to make no corrections at all. The teacher should point out faults, but the scholar should be encouraged to find remedies

himself. Prevailing demerits should be noted, and prevailing merits also, if there be any. In many cases it will be found that a thorough change for the better cannot be made without the recasting of the whole composition: and this will be a useful exercise for all, and most useful to the best writers in the class; for to them no part of the work will be a mere copyist's drudgery, but all will help to train them in the effective use of language, as such work has always helped men who have taught themselves to write or have been taught by good teachers.

Another plan is that of Coleridge's master—a plan which that great writer regards as "imitable and worthy of imitation." "He would," says Coleridge, "often permit our exercises, under some pretext of want of time, to accumulate till each lad had four or five to be looked over.

Then placing the whole number abreast on his desk, he would ask the writer why this or that sentence might not have found as appropriate a place under this or that other thesis; and if no satisfying answer could be returned, and two faults of the same kind were found in one exercise, the irrevocable verdict followed, the exercise was torn up, and another on the same subject [had] to be produced, in addition to the tasks of the day."

It is evident from what I have said all along that I am no believer in the doctrine that a good book or a good essay can be written by one who has nothing to say, or that, in English composition, form is one thing and substance another. Even if it were true that words are the clothing of thought, it would follow that words without thought, however skil-

fully knit together, however richly embroidered with figures of speech, must still bear the same relation to words with thought that an ingeniously constructed scarecrow bears to the farmer who made it. In the best writers, however, words are not the clothing of thought: they are thought incarnate; the language and the idea are united, like soul and body, in a mysterious way which nobody fully understands. More than this. In a great writer the style is the man—the man as made by his ancestors, his education, his career, his circumstances, and his genius.

It is idle, then, to attempt to secure a good style by imitating this or that writer; for the best part of a good style is incommunicable. An imitator may, if he applies himself closely to the task, catch mannerisms and repro-

duce defects, and perhaps superficial merits; but the most valuable qualities, those that have their roots in character, he will miss altogether, except in so far as his own personality resembles that of his model. It has been found comparatively easy, for instance, to copy the big words, the antitheses, the balanced sentences of Dr. Johnson; but who has his sense and his vigor? Carlyle's uncouthness has been caught; but who has his imagination, his humor, his strength? Macaulay's clearness, Goldsmith's ease, Webster's massiveness, is precisely that thing in each which it is most difficult to acquire.

One may, however, get good from a master of English by unconscious absorption, as one acquires good-manners by associating with gentlemen and ladies; and there are minds which are

so thoroughly original that they assimilate from another's writings that, and that only, which is helpful to them. A writer of this class does not copy the style of the author he has been studying, but he reproduces that style combined with something new, so as to form an original product. Thus Keats profited by his study of Spenser and of Milton. Thus Demosthenes, after copying and recopying Thucydides, wrote, not in the style of Thucydides, but in a style of his own. Thus Franklin educated himself by a study of Addison, rewriting the best papers in *The Spectator* from memory, and then comparing his transcripts with the originals; but Franklin's style, though resembling Addison's in some respects, is instinct with Franklin's own personality.

A teacher cannot be expected to find

many excellent writers among the children that pass through his hands; but he may do much for his pupils by helping them to see in their own compositions, not only how far they have succeeded in securing unity in structure and ease in expression, but also how far they have succeeded in putting their individuality into their written words.

Not that one young person in ten thousand has anything original to say; but every human being has a mind of his own, as he has features of his own,—a mind which expresses itself readily enough in his face and in familiar conversation, and which can be helped to express itself with the pen. To the extent that a young writer means to say something of his own, what he writes will have freshness, and will inspire in-

terest in his subject and in him. To the extent that he fails to put himself into his work, he becomes what is known as a hack writer, a mere beast of burden, that serves as a common carrier for the thoughts of other men. . . . .

. . . .

Thus far I have dwelt upon the study of English as a means of facilitating communication between mind and mind, and it is under this aspect alone that I feel justified in demanding a pre-eminent place for the study in every school, whatever its other studies, whatever its grade, whatever its system of education. . . .

I should be the last to deny the pleasures or the advantages of the study of English from the philological or from the literary point of view. Few pursuits are more attractive to an intelligent youth than that of tracing a word through all

the stages of its growth back to the root out of which so much and so many things have been developed. To master the languages from which our own has been formed is to add to our knowledge of history, and to enable us to appreciate more highly the beauty and the power of the stream which we have traced to its source. If pursued in this spirit, the study of English as a language may be of great value, both because it supplies valuable information, and because it broadens the mind and stimulates the imagination; but it would be hard to prove that, on the whole, English in this sense has stronger claims upon a student's attention than Greek or Latin, French or German, Sanskrit or Hebrew.

A stronger case may be made for the study of English literature as such. It is unseemly that anybody (except, per-

haps, a professor of Greek), should know Homer better than Shakspere, Lucian than Swift, Demosthenes than Burke. Whatever else may be omitted, every scholar who gets beyond the three R's should know something of the great English classics at first hand,—a study very different from "English literature" as presented in manuals made up of short extracts and loaded down with superfluous commentaries, annotations, criticisms, with talk *about* books, which rises like a cloud between them and the student, irritating him as well as obstructing the view. Better leave boys to read good books by themselves than impose on them as a task an author whom they might enjoy if presented in the right way, but whom they are likely to detest if they see him only when he is pinned to the floor of the school-room, like

Gulliver in the hands of the Lilliputians.

In this matter the only suggestions I have space for are three: First, every book chosen for reading should be suited to a scholar's age, attainments, and tastes, should be a book that he is likely to enjoy. Secondly, he should be encouraged to read every work through twice,—the first time as rapidly as possible, that he may get the knowledge and the pleasure of it as a whole; the second time with some attention to details. Thirdly, in order to bring his mind to bear on what he has read, he should write on at least two subjects drawn from the book,—the first calling for a general summary of its contents from a single point of view, the second calling for an intelligent account of one scene or character.

Whether, as mere matter of knowledge, the masterpieces of English literature should constitute a part of the education of every child who goes beyond the primary school, I will not undertake to say; but I do regard an acquaintance with the English classics as important if not indispensable to a young writer who is striving to master the art of expression. This purpose good authors serve, not only directly by providing suitable topics to be written on, and by increasing one's command of language, but also indirectly by stimulating the mental energies, and by affording a keen intellectual pleasure. Thus understood, English literature ceases to be a merely literary study, and becomes as useful to the man of science as to the man of letters—to Professor Huxley and Mr. Herbert Spencer as to Mr. Ruskin and Mr.

James Russell Lowell. Literature is no longer a fund of information which may be weighed against information on other subjects, but it belongs to that kind of knowledge which is power.

The primary object, then, of placing English upon a better basis in the schools, and of giving more time and intelligence to it there, is to enable boys and girls to express themselves in pure and effective language: not merely that they may avoid gross mistakes in grammar and ambiguous or obscure expressions, not merely that they may state facts or opinions in words that can be understood by one who takes pains to understand them; but that, in course of time, they may tell a story or frame an argument so well that he who runs will stop to read it, and that they may be able, the best of them at least, not only to instruct men,

but also to please them in the highest sense, and to move them to noble ends. It may be years before the full effects of the reform will appear; but then they will be felt in all the fields of human activity in which English plays a leading part.

II.

ENGLISH IN COLLEGES.

In most, if not all, American colleges, the teaching of English stands better than it did ten years ago. English is no longer looked down upon, no longer deemed unworthy to be on the same footing with Latin, Greek, and mathematics. It is recognized as forming, and as deserving to form, an important part of the higher education; and this recognition has stimulated teachers already in the profession to better work, and has recruited their ranks with young men and women of ability and enthusiasm.

In some shape, English now has an honored place in every institution which is, or pretends to be, a college or a university; but in this curriculum it means one thing, in that another. Some institutions class English with French and German, Italian and Spanish, under the head of modern languages; and the advocates of the study in this sense are fond of pitting the modern languages against the ancient ones, or of using English alone as a weapon to brain Greek with. Some institutions require all their students to give many hours to Anglo-Saxon, apparently on the ground that the earlier the English the purer and the better worth knowing it is, and the more barren the literature the less the probability that a student will be diverted by some literary *ignis fatuus* from the study of the forms of words. Others,

which do not take this extreme view, neglect every English author since Shakspere, as if he were the latest one worth studying; or they devote themselves to Mr. Browning, as to the Shakspere of the nineteenth century. There are teachers who identify English with rhetoric taught as a science,—that is, as matter of knowledge valuable, not for the use to be made of it, but for its own sake; others identify it with rhetoric taught as an art composed of certain principles, which they strive to apply to the essays of their pupils; others content themselves with demanding a large number of essays from each student, but make no provision for the study of principles, whether as formulated in a textbook on rhetoric or as embodied in literature; and there are some who treat "forensic disputation," or even "ora-

tory," "vocal expression," as the English most important to know.

In each of these fields admirable work has been done, no doubt; but to get the good of it all, an enthusiastic student of English would have to betake himself to several centres of intellectual life. No college in the country, so far as I know, gives instruction on all matters included in the study of English in its widest sense. None provides the requisite facilities for a student who desires to master his mother-tongue in its history as a language, in its completeness as a literature, and in its full scope as a means of expression with the pen and the lips. This state of things is not, and has not been for many years, the case with Greek, Latin, or mathematics. It is no longer the case with some branches of natural science, or with at least two of

the modern languages. Why should it be so with English? Why should a man who wishes to know all that is to be known about the language he is going to use all his life, be at a disadvantage in the pursuit of his favorite species of knowledge, as compared with him whose tastes lead him to regions which only a few specialists care to enter?

The question answers itself. There is every reason why every college in the country should do for the mother-tongue all that it does for its most favored studies; and the time will come, or I greatly misread the signs of the future, when no American institution of learning can afford to economize in the matter of English. Now that learned men and learned bodies, like clergymen and churches, are no longer too far above the rest of the world to be subjected to

the same tests to which other men and other bodies are subjected, and to be criticised with equal freedom, they must cease to devote the resources supplied by public or by private beneficence to the nourishment of hobby-horses whose bones are marrowless, in whose eyes there is either no speculation in the old sense of that word, or too much speculation in the modern sense. A college which is to live by the people must supply the education needed for the people, and for the leaders of the people; and what is so much needed as English? In these days of multifarious knowledge, of intellectual activity in so many directions, there are things of which a man need know the rudiments only: but of English an educated man should know more than the rudiments, because—if for no other reason—everybody knows, or

half-knows, or thinks he knows them; because everybody deems himself capable, not only of criticising the English of others, but also of writing good English himself. Therefore, educated men should arm themselves at all points against the numerous foes that beset pure English on every side, in these days of free speech and a free press. *Noblesse oblige.* Superior advantages bind those who have enjoyed them to superior achievement in the things in which self-taught men are their competitors, as well as in the work of scholarship.

Taking for granted, then, that English should form an important part of every college curriculum, and should be a prescribed study for all students in every college in which any subject is prescribed, we have still to ask whether the objective point towards which the work as a

whole ought to tend, should be English as language, English as literature, or English as a means of communication between man and man. Not that it is either practicable or desirable to teach English in one sense without teaching it in the other senses also. Students of a language cannot go far without taking up the literature in which that language finds its most characteristic expression; students of a literature cannot fail to note some of the peculiarities of the language it is written in, and are likely to have some curiosity as to points in the history and development of language in general; students of the art of composition will be greatly helped in their work if they know the exact meaning of the words, and are familiar with the classics, of their native tongue; and students, whether of language or of literature, can do little with

the results of their labors, unless they are able to communicate them to others clearly and effectively.

What, however, should be the primary aim in a course of study framed to supply the needs, not of specialists, but of the main body of students? Should the purpose be to make them know English as philologists know it? or as literary historians and critics know it? or as it is known by those who say what they wish to say, whether in speech or in writing, in such a fashion that the persons addressed shall readily and fully and exactly understand what is meant, and shall see as vividly that which speaker or writer desires them to see, follow a narrative or a piece of reasoning as closely, and feel the force of argument or of emotion as strongly and deeply, as it is within the power of language to effect?

Can there be any doubt on this question in the mind of anybody who looks at it with unprejudiced eyes—the question, it is to be borne in mind, relating to prescribed studies solely? Every student who chooses to pursue the history of the English language as far back as books will take him, and every student who chooses to devote his whole time to the study of English literature, whether in its general outlines or in its minutest details, should have all the opportunities and all the facilities for his specialty that his college can supply. In optional studies there should be no discrimination, no favoritism; so far as possible, every reasonable demand for instruction in any subject should be granted: but a prescribed curriculum, which is necessarily limited on every side, should comprise those subjects only which

furnish the greatest good to the greatest number.

Among those subjects the art of composition should surely be included, rather than philology or literary history, or even literature except so far as it serves to stimulate the powers of production, and to turn them in the right direction. Rhetoric may be prescribed, not for its own sake, but as one of the means by which a student is taught to write. Knowledge of the principles of the art of composition, as applied by the best writers, ought to help a student to communicate what he has to say in a better form than he would otherwise employ. By the shortcomings of others he should learn what to avoid, and by their achievements what to seek, in his own compositions. What the text-book helps him to do consciously, familiarity with

superior writers ought to help him to do unconsciously. Surrendering himself to the influence of genius, he will be carried beyond himself, his mind will work more freely than usual, and his sentences will reproduce his thoughts in more perspicuous and more telling language. No mind can fail to be stimulated by contact with greater minds, whether living or dead. Shakspere, Bacon, Burke, George Eliot, Cardinal Newman, feed the powers of thought and the powers of expression at the same time, and thus enable one to think, to talk, and to write to more purpose.

If, then, we may assume that English in the form of English composition should be a prescribed subject in every college curriculum in which any subject is prescribed, we have next to consider what may and what not be profitably

done by a teacher of this onerous and often thankless subject. On this matter two extreme theories are held: one, that a teacher can do nothing; the other, that a teacher can do everything.

According to the do-nothing school, "To learn how to write, you have only to write;" "When you have something to say, you will be able to say it well enough;" "A clear thinker will be a clear writer, a forcible thinker a forcible writer;" and so on. Those who favor this view admit, indeed, that an intelligent critic may uproot faults of style, repress bad tendencies, smooth rough places; but they add that he is likely to kill the wheat with the tares, to discourage inclinations in the right direction, to cultivate elegance at the cost of strength, and, above all, to make a young writer self-conscious, self-critical, and,

therefore, more and more artificial,—the effort to follow rules and avoid faults depriving him of the inspiration and the guidance that would otherwise have been furnished by his own healthy, natural self. They declare that under such discipline an original writer, or one who might have become such if left to himself, is reduced almost to the level of an accomplished proof-reader. They point to authors of acknowledged merit who never received any instruction in English composition, and to youths whose written work in college was rated very low, but who soon after leaving college showed that they could express themselves so well as to command attention to what they wrote on subjects with which they were familiar and in which they took a living interest.

In this view there is, no doubt, a ker-

nel of truth. Bad instruction is worse than none. A teacher who confines his efforts to the eradication of faults is likely to do more harm by discouragement than he does good by emendation; but the wise teacher will constantly endeavor to make the soil he cultivates as productive as possible, taking pains all the time to quicken the good seed, and to help his pupils to understand that weeds are removed, not so much because they are weeds as because they choke the wheat. Even such a teacher may at first seem to be doing more harm than good to his pupils; for a novice has to pass through a period of transition, during which, like a boy who has taken half a dozen lessons in dancing, he is awkwardly conscious of his shortcomings, but does not know how to improve. In a few weeks, however, a

teacher who combines tact with common-sense will be able to do for his pupils, or rather to help them to do for themselves, what great writers who had no instructors did for themselves; and the young men under him need not wait till they get out of college before writing good English.

The do-everything school, on the other hand, talk as if it were the duty of an instructor in English composition, not merely to help a pupil to make what he has to say tell for all it is worth, but also to supply him with something worth saying; not only, if I may use the expression, to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, but to fill it with gold fresh from the mint. Some who do not go quite to this length in their demands upon the teacher of English, nevertheless do expect his mill to produce "fin-

ished writers," whatever may have been put into the hopper. "Why," ask the men of this school, "why, if the colleges do their duty, have we so few great writers in this country? Why are so few of the men who do good work with the pen college-bred? Surely the teachers of English either slumber at their posts, or

> "'painful vigils keep,
> Sleepless themselves to give their [pupils] sleep.'"

In this view too, there is a kernel of truth. No teacher should ignore the fact that good English with next to nothing behind it is sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal — the brass of loud-mouthed declaimers or the tinkle of soft-mouthed poetasters. A teacher should make his pupils understand that they must think before writing, must have something clearly in view which they

are to put into language; but it is not his business as teacher of composition to provide them with materials. He may do so if he will; but, other things being equal, young writers do better with topics that interested them before they thought of writing upon them than with those imposed as subjects of composition, with knowledge gathered as knowledge rather than as so much grist for the English mill. So far as possible, a teacher should open the eyes of his pupils to the materials at their command, and should make those already in their possession into as good an article as possible. If the materials are meagre, it is his misfortune, not his fault; and he will make a poor use of his talents if he shows young men how to hide poverty of thought in "finish" of style.

In my judgment, the work of a college

instructor in English composition is, indeed, limited in range, but is very important within its range. All that is done for the more advanced classes in the preparatory schools he should do, and more; for with the maturing faculties of students come new dangers and difficulties for them, and new duties and responsibilities for their teacher. Though it is not his office to provide his pupils with materials for thought, he may well show them how and where to look for materials, how to test them when found, how to choose those that will best serve the purpose in hand, and how to marshal them for service. Though it is not his office to provide his pupils with machinery for thinking, or to keep what machinery they have in running order, he may well assist them to use their talents to the best advantage.

One of his most important duties is to prevent the young men and women under his eye from running into extremes. He should keep them in the difficult channel between the Scylla which wrecks the "used up" youth who says of life what the man in the play says of the crater of Vesuvius, "there's nothing in it," and the Charybdis which boils about the hot little fellow who goes at the criticism of a book or the discussion of a controverted question with — if I may change the figure — a warwhoop and a tomahawk. He should discourage his pupils from announcing platitudes as if they were oracles, and from apologizing for them as if they were original sin; from dealing with a moral question either as if they had long ago lost their relish for cakes and ale, or as if there were nothing but cakes and ale

worth living for; from writing stories that strive to be original, and succeed in being morbid or grotesque, or that outrealist modern realists in the trivialities they photograph and in their ostentatious lack of plot and *dénouement;* from the extra-dry, the sweet, the still, and the sparkling brands of dulness; from poverty of language and of imagination, and from heaping words upon words until what passes for thought has been smothered, or metaphor upon metaphor until one cannot find the idea, if idea there be, for the illustrations; from arid metaphysical subtleties, and vague scientific or religious generalities, from pedantry of every kind and vulgarity of every stripe.

In colleges, as in schools, however, the main business of the teacher of English must be with the art of composition

strictly understood, the art which tells students how to communicate what is in their heads and hearts so that it shall go for all that it is worth. To this end he should strive, in the first place, to stimulate their minds, so that they may put forth their full powers when they write, and put them forth naturally and with the force of their individuality; and, in the second place, he should, so far as in him lies, remove the obstructions which ignorance, half-knowledge, bad training, mannerism, self-consciousness, imitation of poor models, the thousand and one forces that fight against good English, place between the thought and its free and natural expression.

Over some of these obstacles a student's mental energy will, if roused to its full power, carry him by its own momentum; for, as every one knows, a writer

has the best chance of saying what he means to say, and only that, if he is absorbed in the matter of what he is writing, and gives no conscious attention to the forms of words or the construction of sentences. The more firmly his mind grasps the subject in hand, and the more rapidly his train of thought moves, the more probable it is that he will hit upon the best words and the best arrangement of words.

If a teacher, then, is able to interest his pupils in what they are writing so deeply that they put their best selves into the work, he will succeed, not only in giving to it continuity and individuality not otherwise to be attained, but also in diminishing the number of errors and defects. Those which remain should be dealt with firmly but considerately. A student should be made to feel that they

are removed in order that the free flow of his thought may be unimpeded, and that they are of no account as compared with lack of life and of unity in the composition as a whole.

Every teacher will decide for himself how to stimulate his pupils. The means are as various as the conditions of life and the idiosyncrasies of human nature. What is one man's meat is another man's poison. What is successful with a small class will fail with a large one. In all cases, and under all conditions, the one thing needful is that the teacher should have the power to awaken interest and inspire enthusiasm. If he does not throw himself into his work, the minds of his pupils will be cold. They must catch fire from him.

Under the most favorable conditions, the results of English composition as

practised in college are, it must be confessed, discouraging. The shadow of generations of perfunctory writers seems to rest upon the paper, and only here and there is it broken by a ray of light from the present. In place of the Sophomoric spirit with which themes were possessed a generation ago, the spirit of Indifference seems to have entered into them. Sometimes the ghosts of half-read books or of half-heard lectures haunt the dismal pages. Sometimes the spectre of Pessimism, stalking through a student's mind, lays a withered hand upon his pen, and blasts it into sterility, or scares it into hysterics. I know of no language —ancient or modern, civilized or savage —so insufficient for the purposes of language, so dreary and inexpressive, as theme-language in the mass. How two or three hundred young men who seem

to be really alive as they appear in the flesh can have kept themselves entirely out of their writing, it is impossible to understand—impossible for the instructor who has read their productions by the thousand, or for the graduate who looks at his own compositions ten years after leaving college.

Perhaps the most potent cause of this deplorable state of things has been the practice of forcing young men to write on topics of which they know nothing and care to know nothing—topics, moreover, that present no salient point for their minds to take hold of. An improvement (for improvement there is) has been noticed since students have been given greater freedom in the choice of subjects, have been told to choose topics which have already engaged their attention, and to limit and define the topics

they choose so as to keep themselves strictly to one line of thought—whether in discussing a proposition clearly stated, in arranging facts in accordance with some principle, or in telling a story or describing a scene in a coherent and vivid manner.

I have found, too, that most young men do better under pressure than when left to their own devices as to time and space. Such, at least, is my experience with a class of from twenty to thirty seniors and juniors, a part of whose regular work consists of papers a page long, written in the class-room. No manuscript is to be brought in; but students are advised to choose their subjects beforehand, and to find out exactly what they want to say. Any subject will answer; but they are urged to avoid the commonplace, the bookish, the technical, and the

profound, and to choose topics which can be disposed of within the prescribed limits. At first, "Time up" appears at the end of many manuscripts, the writers having undertaken more than they can accomplish within the ten minutes allowed; but experience soon shows each man what can and what cannot be put into a paragraph, and practice gives facility in composition. Having no space for prefaces or digressions or perorations, the members of the class usually begin at the beginning and go straight to the end. Having no time to be affected, they are simple and natural. Theme-language, which still haunts too many of their longer essays, rarely appears in the ten-minute papers. Free from faults of one kind or another these papers are not; but the faults are such as would be committed in conversation or in familiar cor-

respondence. The great point has been gained that the writers, as a rule, forget themselves in what they are saying; and the time will come, it is to be hoped, when they will be correct as well as fluent, and will unite vigor with well-bred ease, and clearness in thought with compactness in expression.

Teachers of English composition, whether they have or have not had an experience like that which I have detailed, must all have seen good results follow a rigid observance of rules limiting essays to a certain number of pages, and requiring them at a fixed hour. All must have seen the advantage to the student of making him feel the pressure of a force outside of himself. All must know too that such pressure, however useful as an educational expedient, is a poor substitute for the self-control which

a young man old enough to be in college should exercise in the matter of writing, as in other things. Undergraduates are fond of talking about the impossibility of crowding all that they have to say into a prescribed number of pages, or of getting their work ready at the prescribed time; they complain of what they stigmatize as a system of "repression;" they are sure that to do themselves justice they must wait for a "mood," an "inspiration," and must give it free course when it comes. Sooner or later, they will discover that the best work in the world is done under conditions, imposed from without or self-imposed, and that the best writers in their several kinds—from Shakspere to a successful journalist—find the conditions under which they labor a help rather than a hinderance.

III.

ENGLISH IN NEWSPAPERS AND NOVELS.

"THE best rule of reading," says Emerson, "will be a method from nature, and not a mechanical one of hours and pages. It holds each student to a pursuit of his native aim, instead of a desultory miscellany. Let him read what is proper to him, and not waste his memory on a crowd of mediocrities. . . . Perhaps the human mind would be a gainer if all the secondary writers were lost,— say, in England, all but Shakspeare, Milton, and Bacon,— through the profounder

study so drawn to those wonderful minds. With this pilot of his own genius, let the student read one, or let him read many, he will read advantageously. . . . The three practical rules, then, which I have to offer are: 1. Never read any book that is not a year old. 2. Never read any but famed books. 3. Never read any but what you like; or, in Shakspeare's phrase,

> 'No profit goes where is no pleasure ta'en:
> In brief, sir, study what you most affect.'"

How few of us live up to the last of these three rules! Books which we do not enjoy, it may be necessary to read for an ulterior purpose; but how many of us waste time upon reading that gives neither pleasure nor profit! How many dawdle over books, with minds half asleep, in a half-hearted effort to do

what, for no sufficient reason, appears to be a duty!

The rule never to read a book that one does not like is, then, with proper qualifications, a good rule; but what of Emerson's other rules—to read no book that is not a year old, and to read none but famed books? Who confines his reading to Shakspere, Milton, and Bacon, as Emerson seems to advise? Is it, on the whole, desirable to shut our eyes to the writings that record the events and mirror the life of to-day?

The bare statement of these questions, which I will not stop to discuss, suggests some of the difficulties in the way of carrying the first and the second of Emerson's rules into practice. What great writer—not to speak of ordinary men—ever did carry them into practice? Shakspere, Bacon, and Milton, at any rate,

did not refuse to read books not a year old. If ever men knew the world, they did. Emerson himself may or may not have read the newspapers with his own eyes, but he certainly read them with the eyes of other men: he frequently freshened his mind by visits to the city, and by conversation which drew him into the currents of the present.

We may, then, hesitate to accept Emerson's rules in the form in which he states them; but his doctrine, taken as a whole, is sound. To read books in which one takes no pleasure is, in the great majority of cases, a waste of time: and if, in spite of continued disgust, the practice be persisted in, it is likely to become worse than a waste of time; for it tends to cramp the free play of the mind, and to make reading a mechanical process instead of a life-giving power.

To read nothing but newspapers and second-rate novels is to waste the "memory on a crowd of mediocrities:" and it becomes worse than a waste of memory and of time if the practice be persisted in, without an effort to like something better; for such reading tends to weaken the powers of attention and of concentration, to diminish, if not to destroy, freshness of thought and individuality of expression, and to relax the mental fibre.

If newspapers and novels had only a general effect upon a reader's mind, they would still be likely to injure his English; but they have a direct and specific influence upon his use of language,—an influence more wide-spread, more insidious, and more harmful than any other; and this is especially true in the United States, where almost every

man has his daily, or, at least, his weekly journal, and almost every woman spends many hours on current fiction.*

To meet the enormous demand, a host of writers have entered the field, who are neither by nature nor by education well-equipped for work with the pen, but who, nevertheless, earn a decent livelihood in this calling, as they would do in any other to which they might turn their flexible minds. Even writers who have literary talent but lack moral stamina are tempted not to take pains, because they perceive that bad wares are at least as popular as good ones.

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* "The women, in fact," writes Mr. Howells, "are the miscellaneous readers in our country; they make or leave unmade most literary reputations; and I believe that it is usually by their advice when their work-worn fathers and husbands turn from their newspapers to the doubtful pleasure of a book."

"It seems a pity," said a gentleman the other day to the proprietor of a daily journal, "that you should not publish more intelligent and better-written notices of new books."

"Oh, they're as good as our readers want," was the answer.

"My wife," said another gentleman to the editor of *The Evening Muffin*, "enjoys reading your paper."

"I should be better pleased to hear that your cook liked it."

Such stories would seem to indicate that some American journals are conducted on principles similar to those to which Mr. Thomas Frost (in "Reminiscences of a Country Journalist," 1886), ascribes the "growing deterioration of journalistic work" in England. "The diffusion of elementary education," says he, "which flooded mercantile offices

with clerks whose qualifications were limited to the ability to write legibly and add up columns of figures, has, for several years past, had the result of overrunning the reporterial [*sic*] market with lads whose sole qualification for reporting is the knowledge of short-hand. As a rule, these young gentlemen are ignorant of grammar, in many instances cannot spell correctly, know little or nothing of modern history, the knowledge of which is essential to a journalist, and whenever condensation is required are apt to make their sentences unintelligible. Their employers, looking for their pecuniary gains from advertisements rather than from the circulation of the paper, condone their deficiencies in consideration of their cheapness; and in time they are promoted to the editorial room, at salaries considerably less than their predeces-

sors received, and proceed to write leaders and reviews without knowing how to construct a sentence in good literary English, or even to write grammatically."

No such relation between employer and employed as is described by Mr. Frost has yet, so far as I know, grown up among the persons engaged in the production of English novels. There are no master-novelists with journeymen at work under them, as journeymen worked for Dumas the elder. The tie between publisher and novelist sometimes seems to be very close; but the cases are probably few in which it has seriously affected independence of action or quality of work. If, however, this branch of industry continues to grow as rapidly as it has done within the last half-century, we may all live to see novels issued

by large establishments organized somewhat after the fashion of newspaper offices.

Meantime, what we do see is a "growing deterioration" in the novels produced from month to month,—a deterioration brought about by general causes not unlike those which tempt newspaper proprietors to content themselves with inferior work. If badly written novels have as ready a sale as well-written ones, badly written novels will be supplied in abundance. In this, as in every other business, skilled workmen are few; and those few, if they find that their best work is not appreciated, are in danger of becoming careless, or of putting their skill to base uses. If they resist these temptations,—as, fortunately for the world, some do,—it is because their ambition is not so much to get fort-

une and fame by their books as to do their best because it is their best.

In all that I say, I am, of course, speaking, not of the ideal journal, the journal that is conducted in all its departments by men of culture (if such a journal there be), not of the novels of Thackeray or of George Eliot, but of the newspapers and the novels of the day.

Even these have merits not to be despised. Most of us would probably find it difficult to induce the editor of a newspaper to put our thoughts on the Irish question into type, or the publisher of successful novels to print our version of the old story of Amandus and Amanda. Our contributions to a newspaper would probably lack the very qualities that give success to editorial articles, which, though far from being models of good English,

suit, nevertheless, the intelligence and the taste of their public; or to paragraphs from the "facile pen" of a reporter, written in language that would make Addison turn in his grave, but containing the facts which people want to know, and stating them in such a fashion that a hasty reader understands them at once. Our novels, though they might not violate the rules of grammar, or paint scenes and characters with a brush too big for both subject and artist, might, nevertheless, be deficient in the art of inventing a good story and of telling it in an interesting way, in knowledge of human nature, and in skill in construction,—not to speak of the "local color" and local dialect which jaded minds demand nowadays. I cannot, indeed, believe, as some writers appear to do, that if Junius should re-

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appear, he would find in our newspaper offices so many pens more powerful than his that he would gladly withdraw into obscurity again; or that if Thackeray should come back under another name, he would have a cool reception from a public accustomed to better work: but I am sure that successful newspapers and novels, with all their defects, are not without merit. To say, as Anthony Trollope did, in 1862, that not a single newspaper in the United States is worthy of praise, and that the very writing is below mediocrity, is grossly to overstate the facts.

The misfortune is that it is the defects rather than the merits, the bad English rather than the good that strikes the eye and sticks in the memory. Faults of newspaper English rapidly spread through space, — a phrase that was

hatched in Texas or Oregon living to chirp among the "All Sorts" of an "esteemed contemporary" in Maine, and, if very bad, dying within quotation-points in a metropolitan journal, which cans it—so to speak—for exportation as an Americanism. Faults of English characteristic of novels descend from generation to generation. From Scott the second-rate novelist catches,—not his naturalness, vigor, manliness, invention, observation, skill in narration,—but his occasional grandiloquence, commonplaceness in thought, or slovenliness in expression; from Dickens,—not his vividness, pathos, and knowledge of life,—but his exaggerations of nature, his eccentricities of language, the alloy left in his style by his early experience as reporter. Whatever in Bulwer or Lord Beaconsfield is pinchbeck; whatever in the Brontë sis-

ters is "intense," in the modern slang use of that word; whatever in Thackeray verges on coarseness, or sentimentality, or prolixity; whatever in George Eliot is awkward or over-scientific in expression; — is absorbed by inferior writers, combined with their own weaknesses, and reproduced in surprising forms.

As most novelists read newspapers, and most journalists read novels, writers of each class catch bad English from those of the other, and adapt it to their own purposes. Hence such differences in the use of language as exist between the two are, for the most part, traceable either to differences in subject-matter, or to the fact, already adverted to, that newspapers are read by more men than women, and novels by more women than men.

In newspapers, the tendency is to sacrifice elegance and refinement to the "forceful" or the "funny;" in novels, to sacrifice vigor and compactness to the sentimental or the fanciful. The old-fashioned newspaper, written to please the respectable and conservative classes, abounds in sonorous or sententious platitudes; in the old-fashioned novel, written to please female Philistines, platitudes are served with love or religion, adorned with flowers of speech, and flanked by descriptions of heroes and heroines and of scenery. The new-fashioned newspaper, being addressed to a public which likes its fare hot and highly spiced, abounds in slang of all sorts, from that of Congress to that of the prize-fight or the horse-race; the new-fashioned novel, being addressed to, and often written by, girls (young and

old) who have more curiosity than experience, spices its pages plentifully with French or pseudo-French, with the *argot* of society, and with expressions too *risqués* for an *ingénue*.

In an age demanding brevity, novelists eke out their stories with petty details that might better be left to the imagination, with obvious reflections, or with irrelevant digressions; journalists swamp their facts or opinions in a flood of words. Sentences and paragraphs may be clear and vigorous, but the chapter or the article as a whole is often obscure and weak. The end may be attached to the beginning, but it is not easy to get hold or to keep hold of the thread of connection.

Often editorial articles—to borrow a happily mixed metaphor—"smack of the mill," the writer sinking his individu-

ality in that of the journal to which he contributes. Even if he had the desire, he has not the time to be himself, as he has not the time to be concise. For the individuality of the novelist there is a better chance; but he also is in haste to get his wares on the market, and is inspired by the idols of the market-place rather than by the spirit within him. If one of his books makes a hit, he copies and copies it until his manner becomes mannerism, his heroine a doll or a caricature, his scenery like that of the old-fashioned drop-curtain.

In novels and newspapers alike, precision in language and nice distinctions in thought are rare. Superlatives abound. There is little gradation, little light and shade, little of the delicate discrimination, the patient search for truth, and the conscientious effort to express

truth exactly, which characterize the work of a master.

To speak of offences against grammar and idiom would be to go into minutiæ foreign to my purpose. Such offences are common, as everybody knows, and will be common, so long as uneducated or imperfectly educated persons are at liberty to handle their pens as they will, without guidance or criticism. Nor is it worth while to dwell either on the affectation of employing words and phrases which are no longer used in good prose, or on the habit of making stale quotations—a habit which may be studied at one of its sources in some of the writings of Hazlitt, whose style, according to Byron, suffered from "a cutaneous eruption."

Newspapers and novels* alike keep

* Most of the examples in this paper are from

"pet words"—words which, like other pets, are often in the way, often fill places that belong to their betters. A good speech is termed "breezy" or "neat;"* a good style, "crisp" or "incisive;" an "utterance" or a comely countenance, "clear-cut" or "clean-cut." Bad features are "accentuated" by sickness. Lectures are "punctuated" with applause. A clergyman "performs" at a funeral; a musician "officiates" or "presides" at the piano-forte. Many things, from noses to tendencies, are "pronounced;" many things, from a popular novel to a popular nostrum, are "unique," and one journal calls a thing "one of the

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American publications, but some are from British ones, for America does not have a monopoly of bad English.

* In an account of the hanging of a husband and wife by a California mob, we read, "The work was quietly and *neatly* done."

most unique;" many things, from a circus to a book, have an "advent." Questions are "pivotal," achievements "colossal" or "monumental," books "epoch-making." Every week something is "inaugurated" or "initiated," and somebody or something is "in touch with" somebody or something else. We are often asked to "await developments." A few years ago newspapers were talking of A. and B. "and others of the same ilk." A word just now in vogue is "weird." We read not only of the "weird" beauty of Keats, but also of the "weirdest" misconstructions of facts, or misstatements of principles. "Factor" and "feature" appear in the oddest company, and "environment" has become a weariness to the spirit.*

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* "I wish," wrote Miss Austen, in 1814, to her niece, "you would not let him [the hero of a

Some novels and most newspapers are prompt to adopt the slang of the day, whatever its source. We read, for example, of schemes for "raking in the dimes." One poetical paragraph ends, "It pulls one up dreadfully in one's reverie to hear," etc. Newspapers "take stock in" a senator, and "get to the bottom fact" of a discussion. The hero of one novel is "padded to the nines;" the heroine of another has a brow, eyes, and face that are all "strung up to the concert-pitch." The journalist's candidate and the novelist's hero alike "put in an appearance," and "pan out well."

The disposition to obscure the mean-

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novel which the niece had written] plunge into a 'vortex of dissipation.' I do not object to the thing, but I cannot bear the expression; it is such thorough novel slang, and so old, that I dare say Adam met with it in the first novel he opened."

ing by technical expressions is not unknown in newspapers, but it shows itself chiefly in novels. Even in "The Heart of Mid-Lothian" we are told that "the acid fermentation" of a dispute was "at once neutralized by the powerful alkali implied in the word secret." Even George Eliot, in her description of Gwendolen at the beginning of "Daniel Deronda," uses "dynamic" in a way which called forth much criticism when the book was published. A later novelist talks of "neuralgia of the emotions;" another of the "effect of the meerschaum's subtle influence upon certain groups of ganglionic nerve-cells deep in his cerebrum." Another calls the hero "one of the coefficients of the age;" and still another remarks that, "as men gravitate towards their leading grievance, he went off at a tangent."

We read of fancy's taking "a tangential flight;" of the "inspiration that was to co-ordinate conflicting data;" of a man's "undergoing molecular moral disintegration;" of life as "being a function of two variables, money and fashion;" and of death as a "common and relentless factor, getting, as time went on, increasing value in the complicated equation of being."

One set of faults seems to spring from the belief on the part of some journalists and novelists, and of young writers who have caught the malady from them, that there are not enough words in the English language to supply their needs, and that, therefore, it is necessary to coin just a few more, or at least to take them from the mint of some other writer of the day. Hence, new forms for old words, and new formations from

old words. One journal tells its readers that "'mentality,' though not in the dictionaries, is a good English word." Another says: "'Christmasing;' we ought to have such a word." The hero of one novel is engaged in "battle-axing" difficulties; the heroine of another has a terrible "disappoint." A traveller "gondoles" in Amsterdam, "hotelizes" in London, and is "recepted" and "dined" on his return to New York. A popular writer talks of rural mechanics too idle to "mechanize." "Burglarize" is a newspaper word; "burgled" has been borrowed for fiction from "The Pirates of Penzance." We read of sounds hollow and "echoey;" of "mayoral" qualities; of "faddists" (people with fads); of a bow which "grotesqued" a compliment; of an "aborigine" (apparently the singular of aborigines); of "cad-

desses"* and "flirtees;" of the "genius of swellness;" of little fellows who "cheek" bigger ones; of men whose good looks do not atone for the "lackness" of their characters, and of desires which are "wide-horizoned." It would be easy to extend this list, if either my readers or I had the appetite to go through what a recent writer terms "a menu bristling with word-coinage." "There's nae living," as Meg Dods, in "St. Ronan's

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* The history of this word is instructive. In 1870 it appeared in print—for the first time, so far as has yet been discovered—in *The Illustrated London News.* In 1876 (in "The Prime Minister," ii., xvii.) Trollope says that Lady Glencora declared that she "would shake hands with no more parliamentary cads and 'caddesses'—a word which Her Grace condescended to coin for her own use." In 1884—at least fourteen years after the word was first printed—Charles Reade (in "A Perilous Secret," i., vii.) felt obliged to define "caddess" as meaning "a cad of the feminine gender."

Well," says — "there's nae living for new words in this new warld neither, and that is another vex to auld folks such as me."

Another characteristic of both newspapers and novels comes sometimes from the ambition to command language that moves in the highest circles, and sometimes from the determination to be funny. I refer, of course, to the practice of using the longest and most high-sounding words and expressions—words which no one would think of using in conversation or in familiar correspondence. "Scribes" of this class, as they call themselves, "savor" their wine instead of tasting it, "locate" men and women instead of placing them, "imbibe" or "perform the rites of Bacchus," instead of drinking. In the morning they "unclose" the eyelids, and "perform the usual

operation of a diligent friction of the organs of vision;" in the evening they occupy "curule chairs" until it is time for them to "withdraw to their apartments." Their spectacles are "lenses;" their burglar "reckons up the harvest of his hands;" their facts are "proven," their streets "paven" or "semi-paven;" the people who dine at their houses are "commensals," and those who ride in their cabs are "incumbents." With them snow becomes "white crystals" or "fluffed ermine purity," rain "an effusion of water," crape "sable insignia of death," potatoes and bread "staple edibles," a dressing-case "travelling arrangements;" "sales-ladies" wait upon "gilded youth;" names are "retired" from visiting-cards; seats are "resumed;" souls are "perused;" prices are "altitudinous;" a politician who happens to be in town blossoms into

a "visiting statesman;" an author "obligates" instead of binding himself; a visitor "refreshes his olfactory organ" with a pinch of snuff; a fortune quickly made is said to be "as stupendously large as phenomenally swift won." The last citation, which is from a prominent journalist, is perhaps no worse in its way than "potential liquid refreshment," an expression used by Lord Beaconsfield and copied many times since; than a later novelist's remark that "the footfalls of a little black mare annotated the silence of the place," while "an isolated stellulated light illumined the snow;" or than a clever woman's designation of veteran soldiers as "mutilated pages of history." Perhaps, however, the palm may be carried off by the novelist who speaks of "the impression she gave from her little slit-

like tacit sources"—that is, apparently, her eyes.

In this last characteristic, novels have, perhaps, taken the lead. Instances of it in its serious form are to be found even in Scott, when he is in what he himself calls his "big bow-wow" mood; as, "The creak of the screw-nails presently announced that the lid of the last mansion of mortality was in the act of being secured above its tenant;" "My blood throbbed to my feverish apprehension, in pulsations which resembled the deep and regular strokes of a distant fulling-mill, and tingled in my veins like streams of liquid fire." Instances of it in its humorous form are to be found even in Dickens, when the reporter in him gets the better of the humorist; as, "ligneous sharper," *i. e.*, Wegg with his wooden leg; he was "accelerated to rest

with a poker;" "The celebration is a breakfast, because a dinner on the desired scale of sumptuosity cannot be achieved within less limits than those of the non-existent palatial residence of which so many people are madly envious."

Word-pictures, so called, sometimes hang on newspaper columns; and they abound in recent novels. One author declares that "God's gold" was in the heroine's hair, for "it was shot through with sunset spikes of yellow light." Another says of the heroine that "the sunlight made a rush at her rich chestnut hair," and affirms that she had "white teeth showing like pearls dropped in a rose, and a white throat in a foam of creamy laces." Another says that "the moon searched out the deep-red lines" in the heroine's hair, and that her lips

had "musical curves." We read of "sultry eyes flashing with the vistas of victory;" of "the amber and crimson lustres of joy;" of a sun "resting on the hill like a drop of blood on an eyelid;" of a head "with one little round spot on the top reminding one of what a bird's-eye view might show of Drummond Lake in the Dismal Swamp;" of a landscape which is "a perfect symphony in brown;" of a woman who is "a ravishing symphony in white, pale green, and gold;" of another who "clings to the fringes of night;" of another whose "small hand, which seemed to blush at its own naked beauties, supported her head, embedded in the volumes of her hair, like the fairest alabaster set in the deepest ebony;" and of another whose "soft, impotent defiance flew like an angry bird, and

was transfixed on the still penetrating gaze of his eyes."

Such are some of the varieties of bad English to be found in newspapers and novels, bad English to which we are exposed, and by which our own English will be injured unless we guard it with the utmost care. For the sake of our English, if for no other reason, we should all try to like something better than reading of this class, and should persist in the effort until we succeed. If Shakspere and Milton are distasteful, we may try Pope or Cowper, Tennyson or Whittier. If George Eliot is dull, we may try Fielding or Hawthorne, Thackeray or Charles Reade, Scott or Trollope. If Bacon seems heavy, Emerson or Landor is at hand. For every reader there is some well-written book which he can enjoy if he will, and which may serve

as an antidote to the noxious effects produced by the novels and the newspapers of the day.

Can we do nothing but provide an antidote? Is there no way of keeping the poison out of the system? If not, what hope can we cherish that pure English will hold its own, even as well as it has done?

One thing we may be sure of: people will not give up reading ephemeral publications. Such publications, on the contrary, seem destined to appear in constantly increasing numbers, and to be read more and more; for, as time goes on, people take more and more interest in the world they live in. They will read to-day's newspaper, however poor in itself, because it has the breath of to-day's life in it. They will give their attention more readily to a clever story in

the last magazine than to Miss Austen's "Emma," because the atmosphere of "Emma" is not, and that of the new story is, their atmosphere. The tide sets strongly one way, and it will make short work of any Mrs. Partington who tries to stop it with her broom.

Another thing seems to be clear: a writer who wishes to be read must have something to say, and he must say it in an interesting manner. People do not prefer bad English to good; but if the good English is in a dull piece of writing, and the bad English in a clever one, they will (and with reason) choose the latter.

It follows that improvement in the quality of current English is to be brought about, if at all, not by efforts to prevent the production or the dissemination of newspapers and novels,

but by raising the quality of those that are produced. Men and women of culture and of high aims must be encouraged to write for the public. Students in our colleges who look to book-making or to journalism as a profession, must be urged to keep constantly in mind that whatever they write should, always and under all conditions, be their best;* and that by best is meant, not merely English that will bear grammatical and rhetorical tests, but English that means something, and means it so strongly that a reader who has once begun the article or the chapter feels obliged to finish it.

I speak of college graduates, not because I believe that they have a monop-

* "He who does not write as well as he can on every occasion," said a well-known critic, "will soon form the habit of not writing well at all."

oly of good English,—far from it,—but because of late years large numbers of them have taken to the pen for a living, and because they are exposed to special dangers. Men whose style is the result of self-directed effort will guard jealously what it has cost them so much pains to acquire; but the "liberally educated" youth, who knows all that Murray and Blair can teach him, is tempted, when he discovers (as he is pretty sure to do) his inferiority in some respects to the self-educated reporter at the desk by his side who began life as an office-boy, but who has "the newspaper-sense," and has mastered the tricks of the trade — is tempted, and sometimes yields to the temptation, to sacrifice his English to his desire to attract attention. If, however, his English is hardy enough to withstand the chilling influ-

ences that surround it, and if he uses it, not as an end in itself, but as a means to something more important, he may not only keep it in its purity for his own use, but may also make it felt in his little world as a purifying and inspiring force.

Even if those who serve the public, whether in newspapers or in novels, write as well as they can, it will still be the plain duty of readers not to give too much of their time to publications that are like the flower of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven or the waste-basket. At its best, journalism can never, in any of its forms, take the place of literature. It does not, as literature does, lift us out of the trivial interests and petty passions of daily life into a pure and invigorating air. It does not, as literature does, speak

a language so noble that while we read we forget our own vulgar and provincial modes of speech. Often, on the contrary, it echoes our lowest selves in its methods, its manners, and its English.

IV.

ENGLISH IN THE PULPIT.

English in the pulpit is subject to the same rules as English out of the pulpit. English that is good in a church is good in Congress; English that is bad in a speech is bad in a sermon. There is no such thing as "sacred rhetoric." Chairs of "sacred rhetoric" still exist, I believe; but it is difficult to perceive any sense in which the instruction given by the occupant of such a chair is "sacred," or any point in which the English he instils into his pupils differs from that taught by those who observe

the rules of profane grammar and rhetoric,—that is, follow the best usage of the best writers and speakers, whether laymen or divines. "I do not think," says Dr. Phillips Brooks (in his excellent lectures before the Divinity School of Yale College), "I do not think there is any such thing as a sermon-style proper. He who can write other things well, give him the soul and purpose and knowledge of a preacher, and he will write you a good sermon. But he who cannot write anything well cannot write a sermon well, although we often think he can."

In applying to sermons the general principles which govern the use of English in other species of composition intended for delivery, we must, of course, take into account the subject-matter of the preacher and the conditions under which he speaks; but we should act in

a similar way if we were dealing with speeches on the tariff or with lectures on electricity. What difference there is between the English of a successful preacher and that of an equally successful lecturer, springs, not from a difference in the principles of composition, but from a difference in the application of the same principles.

Pulpit English has not always been essentially the same with laymen's English. Once the minister was really a pastor, a shepherd of the people, by a figure of speech that was close to the fact; for his flock knew no other pastures than those to which he either led or drove them. To be a minister was to be an authority, from whom there was no appeal. To criticise a sermon as to doctrine, language, or even length, was

like criticising any other divinely appointed dispensation. Generations ago, the bucolic and even the suburban, if not the urban, mind enjoyed listening to "hard" words, through which no spark of meaning glimmered, and even to Latin* or Hebrew quotations; to logic that led nowhither, or led to a conclusion which nobody in the parish doubted; to the condemnation of sins which nobody in the parish had a mind to,—sins committed in Judea, perhaps, or by the Scarlet Woman of Rome; to texts of Scripture which had been stitched into so many sermons that they were worn threadbare; to the droning "first," "secondly,"

* In Evelyn's Diary (1681) we read: "Our new curate preach'd, a pretty hopefull young man, yet somewhat raw, newly come from college, full of Latine sentences, which in time will weare off." In 1683, Evelyn speaks of "Latine sentences" as "now quite out of fashion in the pulpit."

"thirdly," which, by virtue of the numerical order, were assumed to stand for distinct and logically connected propositions; and to the "and now, my brethren," which announced the concluding series of exhortations.

In those far-off days, the people in each parish accepted the sermons which their pastor chose to give them, as they accepted the pastor himself, as they accepted the cold meeting-house in this world and the doctrine of hell-fire in the next. Believing that their minister broke to them the bread of life, they swallowed sour and heavy sermons as contentedly as they did sweet and light ones. "Dulness," as Pope tells us, was "sacred in a sound divine." Great preachers flourished in those times as in all times before or since; but it was possible for ignorance to wear a gown for

a lifetime without being found out, so great was the deference paid to the cloth by the laity,—especially where, as in New England, the social standing of the clergy was high.

To-day the preacher must stand or fall on his own merits. His congregation look up to him, if they do look up to him, not as a clergyman, but as a man. They value his sermons, if they do value them, not as sermons, but as being, or as seeming to the listeners to be, good sermons. Their feeling towards him is not ill expressed by Mrs. Brown, a member of Mrs. Oliphant's Salem Chapel, when she says, "We pays 'em their salary, and we 'as a right to a civil word: but a minister's a minister, and I'll show him respect as long as he deserves it." In the pulpit, as out of it, the minister now receives just as much respect as he

deserves, and no more. Sooner or later, he is sure to find his honest level. To induce those who are not habitual church-goers to go to hear him, he must acquire the reputation of having something valuable to say; to make the inattentive attentive, he must say something worth hearing, and must say it after such a fashion that it will be listened to.

If a discourse, though ideally excellent as a piece of composition, produces no effect on those to whom it is addressed, it is a failure. A sermon equally well adapted to a hundred different congregations—were such a thing conceivable—would be a sermon for nobody. No sermon can be absolutely good. No sermon can be equally efficacious with an American congregation and with an English one, in the city and in the country, in the "first church" and in the

"second church" of the same city, or even in the same church on two Sundays five years apart. A preacher with a sensitive nervous organization soon discovers that a discourse which produced a great effect upon one body of men is powerless with another; and that, if he studies the spiritual good of his parishioners, he must beware of turning the barrel over too often. "Nothing that is anonymous," says Cardinal Newman, "will preach; nothing that is dead and gone; nothing even which is of yesterday, however religious in itself and useful."

In order to impress his hearers, a preacher must hold their minds to the substance of what he is saying. A preacher who pleases by figures of speech, sketches of travel, subtleties of reasoning, happy turns of expression,

graceful gestures, or melodious voice, may "draw full houses,"—to use a phrase often transferred from the stage to certain pulpits; but he is in no true sense successful, unless he fixes the attention of his hearers on the subject-matter of his discourse. A preacher who is complimented upon this or that brilliant passage in a sermon may with reason apprehend that he has failed in the lesson of the day. "Fine writing," says the late Earl of Shaftesbury, "is the pest of all true theology. People will be brilliant, startling, original; and, in that spirit, they sacrifice everything to a 'pregnant expression.'" "Many a sermon," writes President Robinson, of Brown University, "from over-elaboration of its rhetoric, is open to the charge brought by John Foster against the sermons of the distinguished Scotch divine, Dr. Blair:

'They were chilled through in standing so long to be dressed.' The style which diverts attention from the thought to itself, whether from excess of ornamentation or from deficiency of suitable attire, is always a vicious style. And it is a vice that in a sermon is inexcusable. When attention has been arrested by the style rather than by the thought, and hearers remember images and tropes and fine turns of expression instead of the truth discussed, the sermon is a comparative failure. The best style is like plate-glass, so transparent that, in looking at the objects beyond it, you forget the medium through which you see them. Alas! that so much pulpit rhetoric distorts and discolors and half conceals, if it does not hide, the very truth it professes to be making clear."

To inspire interest in the substance

of a discourse is much; but it is not all that is needed to produce a profound impression. We listen, as in a pleasant dream, to the silver voice and the sweet sentiments of certain preachers,—preachers, too, who have something to say; but when they have finished we start up as from a dream, rub our eyes, and return to the wide-awake world, taking with us no more of the sermon than of other dreams. We admire the skill and speed with which a preacher of a very different class puts together an apparently logical structure; but the cloud-castle vanishes the moment we leave him.

The tests of English in the pulpit, then, are to be sought in the pews. It follows,—since the people who go to church are, in our days, very much the same in the pews and out of them,—it follows that a preacher cannot hope to

interest and impress his hearers unless he uses language which they readily understand, language with which they are familiar in the best books they read and the best speakers they hear.

A generation ago there were clergymen—in England at least—whose grammar was not above reproach: but the English of the leading New York preachers of to-day is, as the correspondent of a Boston secular journal affirms, "uniformly correct;" and we may safely assume that what is true in New York is true in every other part of the country. If, however, there be by chance a stray minister anywhere in the United States who breaks the elementary rules of syntax, there is nothing to be said to him as a minister, except what may be said to a layman who has not mastered the A B C of his native tongue.

More than a century and a half ago, the pulpit seriously suffered from an evil which was pointed out by Dean Swift. In "A Letter to a Young Clergyman," Swift condemns "the frequent use of obscure terms, which by the women are called hard words, and, by the better sort of vulgar, fine language; than which," says he, "I do not know a more universal, inexcusable, and unnecessary mistake among the clergy of all distinctions, but especially the younger practitioners. . . . Among hard words, I number those . . . which are peculiar to divinity as it is a science, because I have observed several clergymen, otherwise little fond of obscure terms, yet in their sermons very liberal of those which they find in ecclesiastical writers, as if it were our duty to understand them—which I am sure it is not."

Long after Swift's letter was published, there still existed a pulpit dialect,—or rather several dialects in the several churches, differing from one another in some respects, but agreeing in their unlikeness to common speech. Some of the expressions found in these dialects have, as everybody knows, passed out of pulpit use with the controversies of which they were the battle-cries: others may still be heard in discourses by preachers of the old school, who begin invocations and exhortations with the long-drawn *Oh* of the revivalist. Such preachers use, in prayer and in sermon, pet expressions that sound to some ears like cant; as, "uncovenanted mercies," "beatific vision," "unsearchable dispensations," "sin-polluted lips," "unspeakable and everlasting felicity reserved for the saints." They

are addicted to phrases like "May we have a realizing sense of our shortcomings;" "May we remember our transgressions in the hour and article of death;" "May we, while still in this land of probation, be tremblingly alive to Thy *gr-a-ce;*" "Grant us to grow more and more unto the image of *Gord,*"—a pronunciation which they apparently regard as more reverential than the usual one. "O Lord," says the (unwritten) Methodist liturgy, as taken down by one who has heard it often, "we thank Thee that, while during the past week thousands as good as we by nature, and far better by practice, have been called upon to try the realities of an unknown world, we are still on praying ground and interceding terms, the spared monuments of Thy mercy."

Some preachers who avoid ecclesiasti-

cal formulas fall into philosophical ones; as, "will-power," "subjective and objective," the "categories of the Infinite." Others indulge in sentimental phrases; as, "greenness and beauty," "sweetness and light," "love-service," "soul-building." Others are attached to certain obsolete or obsolescent words, most of which are to be found in the Bible; as, *verily*, *nay*, *peradventure*, *hath*, *spake*, *thereof* and *whereof*, *wherewith* and *wherewithal*, *albeit*, *holden*, *tarry*, *marvel*, *husbandman*, *lintel*, *portals*, *temples* (for churches), *habitations* or *tabernacles* (for houses), *garments* or *raiment* (for clothes). Others are fond of euphemistic or euphuistic paraphrases and circumlocutions; sounding sentences with a good many O's in them, and a good many *mores* and *mosts*; as, *more full*, *more true*, *more clear* (for fuller, truer, and clearer), *most*

good (for very good); tones that are neither speech nor song, but a hybrid almost unknown among adults out of the clerical profession; and styles of pronunciation and enunciation peculiar to the clergy. In one form or another, pulpit English is still to be heard even from those who are hostile to it in theory,—as the poetic diction which Wordsworth was so hot against crept into "The Excursion."

Within a few years, a reaction against ecclesiastical phrases has set in,—a reaction so strong that, like the reaction against the poetic diction of the eighteenth century, it has led to the adoption of a style of writing and speaking very different from that of the past, but not less objectionable. In sermons of this class, the idols of the church are roughly handled; but the very men who assail

the graven images of the pulpit fall down before the idols of Wall Street, of Fifth Avenue, of the caucus, of a literary coterie, and even—worst of all—of what is known as American humor.

It may be doubted whether it is not better to venerate forms and symbols than to venerate nothing; to talk an ecclesiastical *patois*, rather than to borrow slang and vulgarisms from the streets; to use phrases which, though now out of date, were once charged with a sacred meaning, rather than those which embody a whim of the moment, and will pass away with the occasion that spawned them; to preach like a good though old-fashioned book, rather than to brawl like a loud-voiced stump-orator. If the church is to be turned into a theatre, it would surely be better to revive the Miracle Plays of the Mid-

dle Ages than to bring out roaring farces on the boards of the pulpit. Phraseology like that of the Rev. Mr. Lyon in "Felix Holt," or even like that of the Rev. Habakkuk Mucklewrath in "Old Mortality," is as worthy of imitation as language like the following:—

Certain transactions committed by the illustrious Adam.

I lament that Christ's people are carried away by the slosh of the learned gentleman's dissertations.

Man-worship and ecclesiastical bossism; the logic of the situation; a swift mental emetic; a blank draft drawn by the prophet; God forgive us for dawdling with daybreak; you hate the devil, and yet you play the devil.

Sing Sing and New York Tombs, and Shoreditch, London, and Cow Gate, Edinburgh, are only vast carbuncles on the face and back of natural evolution.

"It cannot be possible," say some of these pulpit evolutionists, whose brains have been addled by too long brooding of Herbert Spencer and Darwin, —"it cannot be possible that you believe there was a Garden of Eden?"

"Yes, just as much as I believe that there were roses in my garden last season."

"You don't believe that the whale swallowed Jonah?"

"Yes: if I were strong enough to make a whale, I could arrange safe ingress for any false prophet, leaving it to evolution to eject him."

"Do you believe that Samson slew one thousand men with the jawbone of an ass?"

"Yes; and he who assails the Bible wields the same weapon."

"Do you believe that the water was turned into wine?"

"Yes; and that the wine now is turned into water with logwood and strychnine. There is nothing in the Bible staggers me."

These sentences come from a comparatively small number of discourses, but most of them were uttered by preachers who "draw well," and whose words are reported by the newspapers from one end of the country to the other. These are extreme cases, no doubt; but it is by extreme cases that a tendency may be fairly judged.

Both the ecclesiastical-sentimental and the sensational extreme are avoided by the best modern preachers. Shunning theological and philosophical pedantry in every form, and vulgarity of every species, they draw their language from the well of English undefiled. Their sermons contain no words that the hearers cannot readily understand, and none that shock the sensibilities or offend the taste. Their manner in the pulpit is simple, straightforward, free from affectation either solemn or petty. Consciously or unconsciously, they act on a maxim of that admirable writer, the late Walter Bagehot,—the maxim that "the knack in style is to write [and to speak] like a human being." . . . They "are willing to be themselves, to write their own thoughts in their own words, in the simplest words, in the words wherein

they were thought." They utter their words, I may add, in their own manner, in the manner in which they would naturally speak to other human beings to whom they had something to say. By so writing and so speaking, a preacher may reduce to a minimum the many obstructions to the free and efficient communication of thought from himself to his hearers,—obstructions springing out of the imperfections of human language on the one hand, and the torpor of human minds on the other.

Similar principles apply to questions touching the length of a sermon or of its several parts, to the arrangement of topics, and to methods of treatment. In all these matters, the successful preacher (successful in the best sense) knows how to adjust each discourse to his hearers, to awaken their interest in the

beginning, and to fix their attention throughout,—to fix it so firmly that the impression is stamped upon the memory.

Such a preacher knows that, if he would hold his own against the platform, against books, magazines, and newspapers, he must be short and to the point, must in his first sentence strike the key-note of his discourse, and must keep that note ringing in the ear. Amid the volleys of words from lay preachers of every calibre, he must not only have something to say, but he must say that something as briefly and vigorously as is consistent with perfect clearness and perfect taste, and in as orderly a manner as is consistent with ease and flexibility of expression. "As a marksman," says Cardinal Newman, "aims at the target and its bull's-eye,

and at nothing else, so the preacher must have a definite point before him, which he has to hit. So much is contained for his direction in this simple maxim, that duly to enter into it and use it is half the battle; and if he mastered nothing else, still if he really mastered as much as this, he would know all that was imperative for the due discharge of his office."

I shall not venture to guess how many of last Sunday's sermons will bear Cardinal Newman's test; how many of the preachers on that day had a definite point before them, never lost sight of it themselves, and never let those whom they addressed lose sight of it; or how many even so much as know what is meant by a definite point.

Those who have yet to learn the advantages of definiteness in preaching

may study with profit the career of the famous Dr. Chalmers, as compared with that of the scarcely less famous Edward Irving. Chalmers, says Carlyle, was a man "of little culture, of narrow sphere, all his life;" Irving was a man of broad culture, and had "infinitely more thoughts" than Chalmers: but Irving's thoughts did not, as Chalmers's did, all tend one way. Chalmers's discourses "were usually the triumphant on-rush of *one* idea with its satellites and supporters; but Irving's wanted in definite *head* and *backbone*, so that on arriving you might see clearly where and how." Irving, in a word, had all but the one thing needful; and Chalmers had that one thing in full measure. These famous preachers differed as widely in the quality of their success as in character and mental equipment. Irving blazed

like a meteor in the London sky for a while, but at last went out in darkness and delusion; Chalmers illuminated the Church of Scotland through all the years of his ministry with a fixed and steady light. Irving was a striking phenomenon; Chalmers was, and still is, a powerful influence for good.

Not a few modern sermons cannot be concentrated into a definite proposition,—some because they contain nothing but spectral generalities, such as haunt men who have no real thing to say; some because, though a number of propositions are hinted at, no one of them is developed or pressed home. Some sermons are born of a metaphor, have no existence outside of that metaphor, and at last "leave their little lives in air." Others have their being in a refrain, caught from the text, and owing

such impressiveness as it has to persistent repetition, which soon becomes "like a tale of little meaning, though the words are strong." Some are "pulpit-efforts," in which the struggle to produce "a great sermon" keeps the preacher from saying anything, small or great, that is worth listening to. Some have a literary air, as if pains had been taken with the sentences as collocations of words rather than as embodiments of thought. There are ministers who preach moral essays about virtue,—essays excellent in doctrine and intention, but vague and aimless: the gun is good, but it is as likely to hit one thing as another.

Sermons that lack definiteness, either because they leave out the essential or because they put in the unessential, may do good to some hearers. The seed they scatter may take root somewhere;

but often the "good things," as the phrase goes, which are remembered, are not those which a conscientious preacher would choose to be remembered by. Such a preacher, for example, would hardly be edified by compliments to a striking simile in his morning's discourse, to his graphic pictures of Oriental life, to his picturesque account of the dissipations of Corinth, or even to the ingenuity of his reasoning against this or that heresy.

To preach like a human being addressing other human beings for a definite purpose is much, but it is not all. The sermon may still be dull, cold, ineffective,—may convince the understanding without warming the heart, moving the will, or affecting in any practical way desires, purposes, or acts. "I am sure," writes Dr. Phillips Brooks, "that many

men, who, if they came to preach once in a great while in the midst of other occupations, would preach with reality and fire, are deadened to their sacred work by their constant intercourse with sacred things. Their constant dealing with the truth makes them less powerful to bear the truth to others, as a pipe through which the water always flows collects its sediment, and is less fit to let more water through." "Generalities in thought," writes Professor Austin Phelps (in "The Theory of Preaching"), "naturally take on hackneyed forms in style. These flow in monotonous succession, like the fall of a mill-stream. Weigh them down with a sympathetic delivery, and you will have the clerical humdrum in comical perfection. Hence have arisen dull, ponderous, indolent, corpulent bodies of divinity in sermons,

which remind one of a child's first attempts at composition on duty, friendship, truth, education, industry, time, eternity."

Such "performances" may be termed sermons, if by a sermon is meant a discourse in a church on some moral or religious topic, with a text as its headpiece; but they lack that which is the essence of a good sermon, as of every other form of discourse that aims at anything beyond mere information. They lack life. "Be alive," Carlyle writes to his brother John; "as my Shrewsbury coachman told a Methodist parson; 'be alive;' all is included in that."

In listening to sermons from preachers of various Protestant denominations, and in examining such sermons as have fallen in my way, I have found abundant evidence tending to support the

views I have expressed. Of two sermons equally valuable in point of substance, that proves to be the better which deals with one definite subject, and only one, deals with it methodically, and in language like that used by lay writers and speakers of the best class, and dwells upon the central idea of it long enough and strongly enough and warmly enough to make it felt as well as understood. The parts of the less admirable as well as of the more admirable discourses which stand out from the rest in memory are the simplest ones, the most pointed, the most concrete, those most like the familiar talk of one human being with another human being, whom he earnestly desires to influence.

The sermons, on the other hand, to which it was most difficult to hold the attention, were those that roamed

over a wide field, with no clearly defined purpose or destination in view; or those that circled round the text, like a moth about a candle, which it could not keep away from but which did it more harm than good; or those that sluggishly brought into view the small commonplaces that lie within a large one,—like a nest of empty boxes. The longest sermons were the worst ones, not only because they were long, —and "length is a fatal enemy to the sublime,"—but also because their length was largely owing to the preacher's apparent inability to exclude matters that belonged in some other sermon, to avoid redundancies and needless repetitions,* to

* "It will surprise any one who has not made the experiment," writes President Robinson, "to find how difficult it is to select, out of any two hundred of a man's best written sermons, twenty-five in which there are no repeated thoughts."

leave out introductions that introduced nothing or introduced too much, conclusions that were no conclusions, since there had been no argument, or digressions which never came back to the starting-point.

How, it remains to ask, shall a preacher provide himself with the means of communicating the truth to his hearers in such a manner as to interest and impress them?

If it be true that style and man are one, sermon and preacher must be one. Whatever builds up the preacher's being, whatever broadens and deepens, illuminates and inspires his personality, will tell upon his sermons, and will tell for much if he resolves that it shall. It behooves him to make himself a man, and then to see to it that his man-

hood strengthens and shines through his written and his spoken work, and that he is felt as a personal force behind his sermons, as Jonathan Edwards and Whitefield,—for we cannot place our ideals too high,—Chalmers and Robert Hall, Channing and Frederick Robertson, were felt in the pulpit; and as John Adams and Webster, Emerson and Carlyle, were felt out of the pulpit. No course of life that emasculates a man can be good for him, or for those who look to him for moral and spiritual guidance. If a theological school tends to impair mental virility, the student should leave it. If pastoral visits, intercourse with brother ministers, or the habits of a recluse, have this tendency, they should be given up. If a minister sees so much of the sick and the sorrowing that his own bodily or spiritual health is impaired, he

should take a course of joy. Whatever his special circumstances, he should give himself invigorating discipline, like that which comes unsought to lawyers, doctors, and men of business,—discipline which a man gets while measuring himself directly with his fellows in the struggle for a livelihood.

It is nobody's interest to expose a preacher's sophistry or to puncture his rhetoric. He may go on committing the same faults—whether in argument or in grammar—Sunday after Sunday, and incense will still rise from sewing-circles and vestry tea-parties. If criticisms are made, he is the last person to hear them; for the hard-headed deacon who roughly tells the truth about a sermon which he has just heard, exists chiefly in novels. In a theological seminary, as in college, a student may breathe an air

charged with as much criticism as is good for him; but when he enters the ministry, the chances are that he will receive no serious criticism unless and until he is so fortunate as to marry a woman who has the sense to see his weaknesses and the courage to point them out to him. "I have heard," said Emerson, in his address on "The American Scholar," "I have heard it said that the clergy—who are always more universally than any other class the scholars of their day—are addressed as women; that the rough, spontaneous conversation of men they do not hear, but only a mincing and diluted speech."

Mr. Galton, in his work on "Hereditary Genius," summing up the result of his reading in clerical biographies, declares that "A gently complaining and fatigued spirit is that in which Evangelical Di-

vines are very apt to pass their days." "These words," adds Dr. Brooks, "tell perfectly a story that we all know who have been intimate with many ministers. That which ought to be the manliest of all professions has a tendency, practically, to make men unmanly." Hence, ministers are, or have been until very recently, placed by the community in a class by themselves, as if they were different from other men. They have been treated like persons exceptionally weak, in whose favor discriminations had to be made. It has been taken for granted that they were not above accepting help of any kind from any quarter; and magazines, newspapers, even clothes, have been offered to them at reduced prices.

These badges of inferiority were always offensive to the stronger men of the profession, and have been shaken off

by them. To shake them off altogether, it is only necessary that the clergy as a body should will to do so. If a minister finds that his salary is so small that he cannot make both ends meet, without either starving, or becoming dependent upon public or private charity, let him call a parish meeting, and frankly preach to his people from the text, "The laborer is worthy of his hire." If that expedient fails, he may seek some other field of usefulness. He should steadfastly resist the tendency of a calling that has so much to do with books and with invalids, —the tendency to dwarf and impoverish character. He should constantly bear in mind that he whose own speech is strong and direct is not addressed in "mincing and diluted speech" by others, that vigor in the pulpit is respected by vigor out of it. He should know and feel that

vigor in a sermon comes from vigor in the preacher, clearness of statement and cogency of reasoning in a sermon from the clear and well-trained mind of the preacher, and the power of a sermon to move hearts and determine action from sincerity of belief and intensity of feeling. He only who keeps the springs of his own life full can hope to freshen and fertilize the lives of others.

The preacher who means that the springs of his life shall be full will not confine his reading to sermons and religious journals, or even to theological treatises and to moral and ethical philosophy. He will keep up, not only his Greek and his Hebrew, but his knowledge of every kind. He will follow the course of the natural sciences, so far, at least, as they deal with fundamental principles and general results. He will

find food for his mind in heathen as well as in Christian philosophers, and in books written by unbelievers as well as in those written by believers. He will draw inspiration from great poets, and knowledge of human nature from great novelists. No book that he reads but will have a message for him, and through him for his hearers.

Ministers whose culture is broad as well as deep are to be found in all denominations; but one would hardly venture to affirm that they form either the exceptions or the rule in any denomination. It is to be hoped, however, that the total number of ministers of culture is larger now than it was in 1827, when Dr. Samuel Miller, Professor of Ecclesiastical History in the Theological Seminary at Princeton, published his "Letters on Clerical Manners and Hab-

its." "It is," writes Dr. Miller, "as wonderful as it is humiliating how entirely habits of study are abandoned by many clerical men, almost as soon as what may be called their initiatory course is closed. From that time, they seem to think it sufficient if they read and think enough each week to address their people twice from the pulpit on the Sabbath, in a commonplace way. Thenceforward, they make no solid addition to their stock of knowledge. Their minds become lean and inactive. Instead of causing 'their profiting to appear unto all' every time they enter the sacred desk, they become more and more jejune and uninteresting. With the habit, they lose all taste for study. Their leisure hours are spent in worldly cares or in gossiping rather than among their books. They invite premature intellectual torpor and

debility. They cease to instruct their hearers, and soon become a dead weight, instead of a comfort and a blessing to their congregations. Such is the history of many a minister who had good natural talents, and concerning whom the expectations of his friends were raised, but who could never be persuaded to love study."

The love of study is, however, not enough to keep a preacher's mind from becoming "lean and inactive." A man whose function it is to tell other men how to live will, if he is wise, bring himself within the influence of currents of life that do not reach the surface in books. He will know what the people of his parish are doing and thinking, what temptations are most dangerous to them, what trials most severe. He will watch the course of public events every-

where. He will occasionally go to a great city, in order to receive an impulse from the tides of human activity that pour through unfamiliar streets. He will meet men and women of all grades of intelligence, and will meet them on equal terms.

If at any time secular newspapers and reviews busy themselves with a religious topic,—such as the nature of evil, the inspiration of the Scriptures, the origin of man, or his future after death,—the wise preacher will not keep silent until popular interest in the topic has died out. If public attention is fixed upon some flagrant instance of corruption in office, dishonesty in business, or moral cowardice in public life, he will not put off preaching about political corruption, business dishonesty, or moral cowardice, until the topic has again become an

abstract one, but will seize the occasion to press the lesson of the day upon his hearers. He will look at current questions with calm eyes, will lift them upon the high ground of principle, and will add something important to what everybody is saying.

Not content with the study of books and of men, a preacher who means to make himself thoroughly useful to his people will—by farming or gardening, by practising some handicraft, or studying some science experimentally—cultivate an acquaintance with practical things; and he will seek in nature and in art inspirations and sympathies that neither books nor men supply.

All this he will do for general culture; but every part of his experience will contribute to the excellence of his sermons, and none the less surely be-

cause it does so indirectly. What Dryden says of the translator applies with redoubled force to the sermon-writer. "There are many," writes this great author, — and the excellence of his own prose bears testimony to the value of his counsel,—"there are many who understand Greek and Latin, and yet are ignorant of their mother-tongue. The proprieties and delicacies of the English are known to few; it is impossible even for a good wit to understand and practise them, without the help of a liberal education, long reading, and digesting of those few good authors we have amongst us, the knowledge of men and manners, the freedom of habitudes and conversation with the best company of both sexes; and, in short, without wearing off the rust which he contracted while he was laying in a stock of learning."

There are preachers, I fear, whose sermons have no very close connection with their lives or their thoughts. A minister of this class makes no preparation with the pen or with the mind until the day before the sermon is to be delivered. At last he chooses a text. The next step is to read what the commentators have to say on the text; the next, to find in the volumes of sermons that crowd his shelves what other preachers have said about it. Having thus accumulated a mass of material, such as it is, he proceeds to write,—for he has no time to think for himself, or even to arrange in his mind the thoughts he has collected from others. Writing he enjoys; for, like Mr. Sherlock in "Felix Holt," he is "not insensible to the pleasure of turning sentences successfully." Like Mr. Sherlock, he can "take coffee

[or tea] and sit up late, and perhaps produce something rather fine."

Very different from these manufactured articles is the sermon that leaves a mark upon the lives of those that hear it. Such a sermon is not a manufacture, but a growth rooted in character and developed by culture. It may have been written early or late, slowly or rapidly, or it may not have been written at all; but, whatever the method of composition, the sermon is the result of the original action of a mind that is working with all its energies towards a definite object. In such a sermon, this or that word will be taken,—not because it is either a fine or a coarse word, a plain or a "hard" one, not because it has served in many sermons already, nor yet because it was never in good company before,—but because it is the one word that

conveys the thought clearly and impressively to those for whom it is intended. If a great preacher uses a metaphor, he does so, not in order to adorn his discourse, but because the figure presents his thought clearly and vividly. We may say of him what Cardinal Newman says of the great author: "If he is brief, it is because few words suffice; when he is lavish of them, still each word has its mark, and aids, not embarrasses, the vigorous march of his elocution. . . . He is one who has something to say and knows how to say it. . . . He is master of the twofold Logos, the thought and the word, distinct, but inseparable from each other. He may, if so be, elaborate his compositions, or he may pour out his improvisations, but in either case he has but one aim, which he keeps steadily before him, and is conscientious and single-

minded in fulfilling. That aim is to give forth what he has within him; and from his very earnestness it comes to pass that, whatever be the splendor of his diction or the harmony of his periods, he has with him the charm of an incommunicable simplicity. Whatever be his subject, high or low, he treats it suitably and for its own sake."

V.

COLLOQUIAL ENGLISH.

Pessimists declare—and not altogether without reason—that the art of conversation is among the lost arts. They lament that we have no good talkers, like Addison, Johnson, or Coleridge, and no *salons,* such as gave France social preeminence in the last century. With all our talk about women's rights and women's education, what, they ask, have we in place of Margaret Fuller's classes in social science? With all our speeches and speech-makers, where, in the younger generation, shall we find the easy, graceful, colloquial touch which Emerson and

Wendell Phillips had, which Dr. Holmes and Mr. Lowell have? We "descend to meet," as Emerson complains; and we meet, not to exchange thoughts, fancies, witticisms, but to dance, eat, drink, to discuss the weather, the fashions, the latest engagement, or to listen to set speeches on stated topics. Many a man is too tired, many a woman too anxious, almost every one too self-conscious, for genuine social intercourse. In the family circle, it is the grown people who are seen but not heard. The talk of the young is either learned and would-be profound, or puerile and full of slang, or all noise and giggle. The best of it is carried on by the eyes.

To remedy the deplorable state of the social world which pessimists picture in these exaggerated terms, it has been seriously proposed to have our colleges teach

the art of conversation, as some of them now teach, or attempt to teach, journalism and the art of oral discussion. The experiment might be worth making, and it would, no doubt, in proper hands, be to a certain extent successful. An intelligent teacher might, at least, collect raw material for conversation from reading, observation, and reflection upon what had been read or observed, might enlarge and purify his pupils' vocabulary, and might give them facility, if not felicity, of expression.

Such instruction would naturally bear most fruit in an institution in which both sexes were represented: but even there the social faculty would be developed outside of the class-room rather than in it; at times when students were drawn to one another by natural affinity rather than when they were brought to-

gether by the college authorities; at times when they chose their own topics rather than when they talked on prescribed ones. The effort to make conversation a literary exercise would inevitably impair the freedom which is the charm of social intercourse: for the instant a talker begins to pay close attention to correctness of language and harmony of periods, he is in danger of becoming dull; the instant he aims at the literary development of an idea or the logical maintenance of a proposition, he is in danger of becoming bookish or disputatious, or both. It is when he is so deeply interested in his subject or in his company as to forget himself, it is in moments when a strong feeling is dominant, that he is at his best; but such moments would be rare in a class-room organized for instruction in conversation.

If question and answer, remark and rejoinder, ever fly fast under the eye of a teacher, it must be when he pays more attention to the substance of what is said than to the form of expression. The art of conversation can be taught, if at all, not as a thing by itself, but as an incident to something else; and it can be taught with most advantage to a class small enough to be treated, not as an audience to be lectured to, but as so many individual minds. In oral as in written work, a teacher may do much for his pupils' English, if he does not undertake to do too much.

Perhaps, however, more may be done in the cultivation of the social faculty before a boy goes to college than afterwards. In this matter, as in others, physical conditions are important; for, other things being equal, a child who

abounds in animal spirits and nervous energy will talk better than his bloodless companions. In family life, too much repression of young people is as bad as too little. A mean is attainable between the practice of forcing children, as our ancestors did, to sit like deaf-mutes in the presence of their elders, and that of suppressing the parents altogether, as is often done nowadays, while the children gabble in language caught from an ignorant nurse. A child's table English should be looked after almost as closely as his table manners, but not so closely as to make him feel that he is nagged. His books should be scrutinized, not only as sources of mental and moral strength or weakness, but also as influences tending to form habits of correct, vigorous, and agreeable expression, or to retard the formation of such hab-

its. To choose all his playmates for him may not be feasible; but intimacies may be fostered with children who come from cultivated stock and whose English is looked after at home. In the choice of teachers, preference may be given to those whose language is least open to criticism. In-door games which give practice in the use of words, or enlarge the vocabulary, may be favored rather than those which consist of little but noise. Children, in a word, may and should be guarded and guided in the matter of English at every point; for at every point, as has often been said, the foes of good English encompass them.

To young men and women who have learned to talk pretty well at home, school and college may give a helping hand without appearing to do so.

They may infuse life into the intercourse between teacher and pupil; confirm habits of simplicity and fluency of speech; encourage clubs in which conversation plays a leading part; recommend books that add to a reader's stock of words and show him the value of naturalness and individuality in expression; distinguish the good parts of a classic from the parts not so good, and the true notes in a piece of current writing from the false ones; point out the merits and the defects of a pupil's own work, spoken as well as written; and keep constantly before his mind the supreme importance of saying what he has to say in pure and idiomatic English.

After all, however, parents and teachers can do comparatively little towards the production of good talkers,—far less, indeed, than they can towards the pro-

duction of good writers. Young people who have had excellent instruction in writing, and none at all in talking, may, nevertheless, talk better than they write: for, as Pascal says, "Il y en a qui parlent bien et qui n'écrivent pas bien. C'est que le lieu, l'assistance les échauffent, et tirent de leur esprit plus qu'ils n'y trouvent sans cette chaleur." A manuscript may be held before the eye as long as is necessary for purposes of criticism, and it should be criticised in cold blood: but spoken words are gone with the breath that uttered them; they must be criticised, if at all, while they are on the wing, and to criticise them then is to stop the flight in which their life consists. It is only in Rabelais, and in the travels of Mandeville as related by Addison, that words flow as freely after they have been thawed as before they

were frozen,—a phenomenon which even the phonograph may never fully reproduce.

In talking, even more than in writing, it is practice which makes perfect. A talker may be helped in various ways, but he must form himself by talking. "Conference maketh a ready man," says Bacon; and readiness, if not the essence of good conversation, is one of its essentials. Other things are no doubt desirable. Multifarious, though not necessarily exact or profound knowledge; ability to contribute to the discussion of every topic as it comes up something that seems new, and to do so without pedantry or arrogance, vulgarity or pertness, without insisting or persisting; tact, or the gift of knowing when, to whom, and how to say this or that, when to speak and when to be silent; the royal gift of language that

fits time, place, and person; the royal gift of manner that sends each word directly and gracefully to its address;—all these, not to speak of purely intellectual or moral qualities, the excellent talker must have: but is not readiness part and parcel of each? that which gives value for conversational purposes to each? that which transmutes ore into coin that is current everywhere? To have one's physical, mental, and spiritual possessions fully in hand is more than half the social battle, is it not?

To a ready talker clever things occur while he is talking, and not on the staircase when the conversation is over. His wits are always and altogether at his command; what he knows — fact, argument, anecdote, illustration — is at his tongue's end; what he feels he feels promptly and can express at once. Out

of his head, at a touch from some one of the company, comes what passes in that company for Minerva, fully armed and equipped. He never argues, never wrangles, never stagnates. He never tells a long story, or misses the point of a short one. In his company, the dinner-hour is a "regeneration of body and mind." He has mastered the art of conversation as defined by Lord Beaconsfield—"to be prompt without being stubborn, to refute without argument, and to clothe grave matters in a motley garb."

Useful to a talker as all readiness is, what he needs most is readiness with colloquial English. To accumulate a fund of such English, one should listen to good talkers, and should read books that reproduce the language of good talkers; to be sure of having the fund thus accumulated ready for use, one must talk

much, and must talk with many people on many subjects.

What is colloquial English? In what respect, if in any, does it differ from the English of the platform and the pulpit, and from that of books? If there is a difference, should it be removed? Do we praise a man when we say that he talks like a book, or an orator when we say that he speaks as if he were conversing with his hearers, or an author when we say that he writes as he talks?

Other things being equal, the best spoken, like the best written, English is that which conforms most closely to the language as used by men and women of culture,—a high standard which it is by no means easy to live up to in daily conversation. To keep local or professional peculiarities out of one's speech

is more difficult than to keep them out of one's manuscript. It is more difficult, too, to settle questions of accent or of pronunciation than those of spelling and punctuation, and that for two reasons. In the spoken language, fashions vary more rapidly and more capriciously than in the written one; and it is not always clear (especially in the United States) to what authority, in a doubtful case, an appeal can be made. For the most part, however, cultivated men and women in English-speaking nations speak substantially alike. It is perhaps impossible to get rid of local characteristics altogether; but now and then an Englishman or a Scotchman is mistaken for an American, and sometimes even an Englishman fails to discover a travelling American's nationality.

There are, no doubt, differences in vo-

cabulary, intonation, and accent between the English of almost all well-bred Americans and that of equally well-bred Englishmen, as there are, to a quick ear, between the speech of a man born and brought up in Chicago or Richmond and that of a Philadelphian or a Bostonian; but, these differences apart, cultivated men and women of English-speaking nations speak, as they write, the same language.

Some of the differences between colloquial and other English grow out of the very nature of speech. One of these suggests itself at once. The language of conversation should be, and should seem to be, the inspiration of the moment. A talker should abstain from sentences that bear the marks of having been framed in advance, and from words that sound as if they had been chosen with care.

His mind should seem to be set in motion, not by reading or reflection, but by the impact of another mind upon his. Even Sheridan, who thought out his clever things for the day before getting up in the morning, had to lead the conversation to the spot where his treasures were hidden. In order to do this without being detected, he had to keep his wits on the spring; for if those with whom he talked had guessed what he was doing, his charm would have vanished. As it was, he was accounted a brilliant rather than an agreeable talker; there was a hard, metallic glitter to his talk, as there is to the dialogues in his plays.

Sheridan's genius gave him great social success; but who really enjoys the society of "the conversation man" as described by Lord Beaconsfield?

"His talk is a thing apart, got up before he enters the company from whose conduct it should grow out. He sits in the middle of a large table, and, with a brazen voice, bawls out his anecdotes about Sir Thomas or Sir Humphry, Lord Blank, or my Lady Blue. He is incessant, yet not interesting; ever varying, yet always monotonous. Even if we are amused, we are no more grateful for the entertainment than we are to the lamp over the table for the light which it universally sheds, and to yield which it was obtained on purpose. We are more gratified by the slight conversation of one who is often silent, but who speaks from his momentary feelings, than by all this hullabaloo."

Even if a would-be Sheridan succeeds, his trials, as Byron tells us, are many.

"I must not quite omit the talking sage,
Kit-Cat, the famous conversationist,
Who, in his common-place book, had a page
Prepared each morn for evenings. 'List, oh list!'—
'Alas, poor ghost!'—what unexpected woes
Await those who have studied their bons-mots.

"Firstly, [*sic*] they must allure the conversation
By many windings to their clever clinch;
And secondly, must let slip no occasion,
Nor *bate* (abate) their hearers of an *inch*,
But take an ell—and make a great sensation,
If possible; and thirdly, never flinch
When some smart talker puts them to the test,
But seize the last word, which no doubt 's the best."

With ordinary men, preparation in the matter of language betrays itself, as all of us who mix much with the social world must have noticed. A person who makes such preparation is like a hostess who, having asked her guests to take pot-luck with the family, receives them in full-dress. He is, we instinctively feel, taking us at a disadvantage. We doubt

the sincerity of opinions which it has been found necessary to formulate in advance, and the originality of sayings which might have been copied from a book. The artificial phrase hides the natural feeling of the speaker; he purchases literary excellence by the loss of life as well as of truth.

Preparation in the matter of language is, then, to be discouraged; but society would be duller than it is if preparation of no kind were made by those who, like the dead people in Mr. Crawford's novel, are "alive for the purposes of conversation" only. The rich and varied life of a doctor, a lawyer, or a man of business, supplies him with topics in abundance; but those who lack such resources are not to be blamed if, before going out of an evening, they take a hasty swallow of the last new book, or

of a review of the last new book, or—if they have not time for that—of the essence of the periodicals of the month extracted by a skilful hand and "flavored to suit."

In New York and Washington, if I am not misinformed, "seminars" are periodically held, at which a clever woman coaches other clever women in the political, literary, and ethical topics of the day. Such "seminars" cannot but be for the advantage, not only of the women they prepare for social ordeals, but also of the society which these women frequent. Each woman will add something of her own to the knowledge with which she has been crammed, will at least put facts and ideas into her own words, make them her own in some way. This may be done so well that one who is not in the secret is not

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likely to guess that each of several women with whom he has been talking drew the material of what she said from a common stock provided at the afternoon conference.

If the male moth of society should have his "seminar" too, and should get as much help from it as women do, what a start would be given to conversation, —as regards, at least, the variety and the range of topics discussed! Awkward masculine minds would, however, absorb less from the conductor of a "seminar" than women do, would contribute less of their own, and would trust less to the inspiration of the moment for their language. The facts and opinions they had listened to might be reproduced in a stereotyped form, and thus they might lose more in spontaneity than they gained in information. A dull

man might, like Mr. George Meredith's Arthur Rhodes, fire "a gun too big for him, of premeditated charging." To such a discharge, his hostess, like Mr. Meredith's Lady Wathin, might naturally prefer "the old legal anecdotes, sure of their laugh, and the citations from the manufactories of fun in the press, which were current and instantly intelligible to all her guests," or even "an impromptu pun," if plain enough to be promptly understood.

The importance of talking or of seeming to talk extempore is so great that we more than pardon in a talker inaccuracies of language that would be inexcusable in a writer. We expect them, as a matter of course; we expect such as are common in the class to which he who makes them belongs: for there is no hard and fast line between faults that

may and faults that may not be committed with impunity. A circle in which it would be an unpardonable sin to say *ain't* for *isn't* or *aren't*, might not notice *don't* for *doesn't;* and another which frowned upon *don't* for *doesn't*, might not be disturbed by "I don't know *as*" for "I don't know *that:*" but almost every circle would look askance at a conversationist who never used *who* for *whom*, never mixed singulars and plurals, never began a sentence in one way and ended it in another, never broke off in the middle of what he was saying, never fell into slang, never threw the accent on a wrong syllable or expressed his meaning inexactly. He who commits no offence against the conventional rules of the language excites a suspicion that he has taken special precautions against a possible violation of them.

We all know, of course, that talkers have existed—still exist, perhaps—who have acquired the habit of expressing themselves off-hand with as much accuracy as ease; but such cases are rare. The easy talker is usually inexact in his English; the correct one is stiff, is like Mr. Thomas Day, the author of "Sandford and Merton." "Mr. Day," says Miss Edgeworth, "always talked like a book, —and I do believe he always thought in the same full-dress style. This was the result of the systematic care he had early taken to make himself master of his native language, and to cultivate eloquence."

Nowadays, as between two expressions of which one is a little more lively but a little less formal than the other, good talkers will choose the less formal, though it may be vulgar in the eyes of precisians.

It is only in schools conducted on the principles held by Dickens's Mrs. General that one is expected to say: "come *hither*," instead of "come *here*;" "*whence* did he come?" instead of "*where* did he come *from?*" Outside of such schools, the language of life, even though it be not high life, is better suited to the purposes of conversation than the language of books. In the days of brocades and the minuet, vulgarity was a bugbear; in the days of tulle and the polka-glide, stiffness and formality are in disfavor.

In conversation, loose sentences are preferable to periods. A periodic sentence—that is, a sentence so framed that it keeps a hearer in suspense about the meaning until the very end—is probably in the mind of the speaker, as a whole, before it is uttered; a loose sentence—that is, a sentence that says some-

thing in the first clause which is added to, subtracted from, changed in some way as the sentence goes on—is probably built up word by word as it falls from the lips. The latter has the further advantage of being readily understood. A reader can go over a sentence until he understands its meaning as a whole; a listener must catch the meaning at once, if at all. Even in sentences so short that they would be readily understood in either shape, a talker is more likely to use the loose than the periodic form. We might naturally write, "Though I went to town early, I had no time for shopping;" but it would be natural to say, "I had no time for shopping though I went to town early," or "I went to town early, but I had no time for shopping."

The best conversation is discursive

rather than methodical; for the logical development of a series of thoughts, or even of a single thought, suggests that the subject-matter, if not the language also, was arranged beforehand. It is, therefore, fatal to that appearance of extemporaneousness which is the life of good talk, and which enables a talker to adjust what he says to what is said by the rest of the company. Even when a man attempts to persuade the person with whom he is talking to some course of action, he should take care not to be too consecutive, not to press a point too long or too far. The arguments may be as numerous and as strong as one pleases, but they should not be so arranged as to lead to the belief that the chain was forged beforehand. Warmth is natural to an earnest talker, but it should come from friction with opposing

views. Blows may fall fast, but they should not seem to be dealt with malice aforethought: the drawing-room should not be turned into an arena. One should carry the day, not by a regular siege, but by short and sharp attacks. Witness the practice of Dr. Johnson and of Carlyle.

The English of conversation should be, not only the product of the moment as regards words, sentences, and general arrangement, but the product—and the best product—of the talker's mind. It should be not only extemporaneous but individual. It should bubble up from its source, like water from a spring. In the effort to secure literary excellence, even a great writer is in danger of losing a part of his personality, and none but the greatest succeed in putting the whole of themselves into their written work.

For a talker to preserve his personality should be less difficult, since from him freshness rather than finish is expected. If he be thoroughly himself, we give him full liberty to phrase his thoughts as he will, sure that what they lose in exactness and beauty they will gain in force and raciness. If he says what occurs to him without thinking of his language, his language will be the best he has at hand. If his talk is genuine, it will count for all it is worth.

Much of what has been said about the English of conversation holds good of the English of addresses that are not read from a manuscript. A public like a private speaker should beware of purism in the choice of words, and of artificiality in the construction or the arrangement of sentences, or in the manner of

utterance. A doubt whether what is apparently extemporaneous has been learned by heart is an obstacle to success, an obstacle far more serious than faults in pronunciation or slips in grammar. From these even eminent orators are not altogether exempt. If they were, they might be suspected of having prepared in cold blood what they speak with apparent passion—a suspicion that becomes a certainty in the case of one who uniformly avoids on the platform mistakes such as he sometimes makes in the drawing-room.

Between the English of the drawing-room and that of the platform, there is, however, one important difference. A speech is, as conversation is not, consecutive in form, and it should be so in fact. Arguments should be presented in an effective order, should support one another,

should lead to a predetermined conclusion. The line of thought may be illuminated by illustrations and enlivened by anecdote; but in all speeches which aim at anything beyond mere amusement, there should be a line of thought. Usually it is wise to commit the order of thought to memory —to make up the train, so to speak, before starting; but the couplings of the train should not be in sight. It is hard to say which is the more wearisome, a speaker who rambles through the universe, with no destination in view and no apparent reason either for going on or for stopping, or one who moves slowly along a straight and sandy road, counting the milestones as he goes, and pointing from time to time to a distant object at which the tribulations of the tiresome journey are to cease. The best speaker is he who carries his hearers forward so steadily

and so agreeably that they are sorry when the journey is over. Such a speaker, Dr. Ezra Ripley, the old Concord minister, appears to have been. "He," says Emerson, "had a foresight, when he opened his mouth, of all that he would say, and he marched straight to the conclusion. In debate in the vestry of the Lyceum, the structure of his sentences was admirable; so neat, so natural, so terse, his words fell like stones; and often, though quite unconscious of it, his speech was a satire on the loose, voluminous, draggle-tail periods of other speakers. He sat down when he had done."

Even a short after-dinner speech should have coherence; and it will be all the better, if—like the five-minute speeches with which Judge Hoar year after year delights the Harvard chapter of the Phi

Beta Kappa Fraternity—it contains but one original idea clearly stated, and but one fresh story well told.

In our day, the best speakers prefer colloquial to declamatory, or oratorical, English—the natural language used in the intercourse of daily life to the artificial language so common a century or even a generation ago. The movement towards this ideal grows every day. In Great Britain, indeed, swelling and swollen periods, such as Chatham thundered forth, are things of the past. In Parliament, at the hustings, at Lord Mayors' and Literary Fund dinners, speakers aim to say what they wish to say, or to hide what they wish not to say, in simple and business-like words. Their graces, if graces they have, are such as would shine in the social world. Their eloquence, when they are eloquent, comes—

as it might come in society—from the subject, or from the excitement of discussion.

In the United States we are moving in the same direction. In our political conventions, "highfaluten" speeches are still made, to be sure; but the very newspapers which report them know that they are "highfaluten," are made for "buncombe," or to give a pretext for flag-waving and for "yells" for a favorite candidate. In the country at large, such speeches are endured as a part of "the campaign," conventionally a matter of course, but in no respect useful except as a means of luring innocent voters who are to be finally caught by more "solid" considerations. Even stump-speeches are now, as a rule, addressed, in appearance at least, to the understanding, and are couched in simple lan-

guage. Wit goes farther than declamation; a homely illustration is more telling than a poetical one. The American love of bombast has made way for the American love of smartness. Fourth of July fire-crackers have outlived the pyrotechnics of Fourth of July orations. We still praise ourselves freely, as our ancestors did, but we do so with less "fuss and feathers."

At the bar, a similar change may be noticed. It is harder than it once was to "enthuse" juries—if I may use a word which, like "highfaluten," seems to imply that what was once sublime has become ridiculous. Lawyers talk to twelve men instead of "addressing the panel." Even Rufus Choate, were he to come to life again, would find it difficult to win such cases as he did win, unless he kept his imagination in a leash, shortened and

simplified his periods, and made his delivery conversational. In orations on memorial days or at literary festivals, colloquial English is heard. Even the essays spoken at college commencements are ceasing to be "mere emptiness."* In the Northern, and especially the North-eastern States, the preference of colloquial to oratorical English is, for obvious reasons, stronger than in the South and the extreme West; but it is showing itself in all parts of the country. It is a preference that should be encouraged by all who prefer the simple to the ornate, the natural to the artificial, the sensible to the sonorous.

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* Words applied by a critic of the day to passages in an oration delivered by Daniel Webster in his Sophomore year (1800): a judgment with which Mr. Webster concurred.

Epistolary correspondence might, but for its limits in time and space,* be defined as conversation with the pen. In a letter, since there is almost always an opportunity to look it over before it is posted, slovenly expressions are less excusable than in what falls from the lips; but even in a letter we are less shocked by slips in English that would disgrace a book than by sentences that bear marks of preparation.

Whatever faults of expression a letter may have, it is a good letter if it makes the reader feel that the writer is speaking with the pen out of the fulness of the heart, not composing something to

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* As to these limits, see Charles Lamb's delightful essay entitled "Distant Correspondents." The difficulties Lamb found in communicating with a friend in New South Wales hamper, in some degree, all correspondence by post.

be read. When we hear that Lady Duff Gordon said, "I never could write a good letter; and unless I gallop as hard as I can, and don't stop to think, I can say nothing; so all is confused and uncorrected," we feel sure that her letters are agreeable reading. When Swift writes to Lord Bathurst, "I swear your Lordship is the first person alive that ever made me lean upon my elbow when I was writing to him, and by consequence this will be the worst letter I ever writ," we expect to find Swift in his letters. When, on the other hand, we are told that Lord Orrery, Swift's "noble biographer," made transcripts of his letters, "following regular rules of composition," "adding chapter and verse for model and pointing out the elegance of his own conceits," we are glad that Lord Orrery does not write to us. When we

read that the letters of Mr. Day—the man who talked like his own "Sandford and Merton"—were written as fast as his pen could move, and, nevertheless, are so rhetorical as "to give the idea of their being composed with great care," we are thankful that we are not obliged to read them.

What gives charm to the letters of Swift, Chesterfield, Cowper, Gray, Lamb, Byron, Dickens, Macaulay, Carlyle, is their air of having been written off-hand and of being charged with the writer's personality. When a letter by a less famous writer deeply interests strangers, it is because the written page puts them face to face with a human soul which has found free and full expression. In private life, almost every one who has many correspondents counts among them one at least whose letters have a per-

sonal charm, and are as delightful as his, or more frequently her, best talk. In Great Britain, indeed, it is in the letters of cultivated women, as De Quincey said, that pure, idiomatic English survives.

Letters, on the other hand, that were obviously written for publication, or for effect, or as pieces of composition, are in no proper sense letters. Pope's famous productions repel a reader who knows that they were originally composed, not for the person nominally addressed, but for the public, and were unscrupulously edited before being given to the public. "Written for everybody," as has been said, "they interest nobody." Even Emerson's letters, good as they are, suffer from his practice of copying them, or at least from our knowledge that he copied them. Whether he expected them to be published after his death, or wished to

make his sentences more epigrammatic, or to keep his correspondents from knowing him intimately,—whatever his reason for taking such pains,—the effect is to take from the letters the freshness and genuineness of familiar talk. To get nearer to Emerson, most of us would willingly give up the Emersonian polish which, as we suspect, the letters acquired between the first draft and the transcript.

The same absence of method which characterizes the best conversation belongs to the best letters. Aim at the regular development of a thought, and your letter becomes a treatise. Insist on a topic too long or too earnestly, and your letter becomes a sermon or an harangue. Letters should take much for granted and leave much to the imagination. A letter-writer cannot emphasize

or eke out his meaning by a look or a gesture, as a talker can do; but he may, if he knows his correspondent well, strike familiar notes, and thus, through the association of ideas, say much more than appears to be said. "A letter," as Jeanie Deans says, "canna look, and pray, and beg, and beseech, as the human voice can do to the human heart;" but it can touch chords in a heart it knows that will vibrate long.

We have still to consider what place colloquial English should hold in books and other written compositions.

That the written language of almost all children and of the great majority of young people differs widely from their spoken language—and not at all for the better—everybody knows. Everybody knows, too,—everybody, at least, who

knows the history of the language,—that a difference almost as great, but dissimilar in origin and in characteristics, once existed between the English generally talked and that written by the few to be read by the few.

Not that the distance between the literary and the living language was ever so great in English as in some other tongues; but even down to the end of the seventeenth century there was a marked distinction between the two. The living language was used in plays that were to be performed before a mixed audience, in poems that were read aloud, in translations of the Bible, and in a few books, like "The Pilgrim's Progress," written by uneducated men and aimed at the popular conscience; but the great majority of authors, expecting to be read by scholars only,

used scholastic rather than popular words and constructions. Dryden was, perhaps, the first prose author of eminence who recognized the importance of a mastery of living as well as of literary English; and even he had not learned the lesson thoroughly. He had "scattered criticism over his prefaces," says Dr. Johnson, "with very little parsimony; but though he sometimes condescended to be somewhat familiar, his manner was in general too scholastic for those who had yet their rudiments to learn, and found it not easy to understand their master. His observations were framed rather for those that were learning to write than for those that read only to talk."

When, however, the reading public came to include many persons of both sexes who were far from being scholars, writers naturally adapted themselves to

the tastes of the majority. It was Addison's boast that he had brought philosophy down from the clouds and out of the closet, and had served it with the tea and toast of society. It was Swift's purpose—achieved with wonderful success—so to write as to be readily understood by any one who could spell out the words or could follow a reader who had spelled them out in advance. Defoe did, perhaps, even more than Swift or Addison to diminish the differences between spoken and written English. His writings are full of words taken from the familiar speech of plain people, and of slips of expression usual in his time with rapid talkers who had more mother-wit than culture. Other writers of Queen Anne's time followed in the steps of the masters, and soon the written language took the form which it

has kept, in the main, till the present time. Modern English dates from the beginning of the eighteenth century.

In one eminent contemporary of Swift, the transition from ancient to modern methods of writing was towards an oratorical rather than a colloquial style. Shut out from Parliament by mistimed politics, Bolingbroke wrote pamphlets that sound like speeches, and that reached a much larger public than they would have reached as speeches. Aiming to compose periods that should sound well, he eked out his matter with words, his eloquence with declamation. The influence of his swelling sentences, like that of Pope's rhetorical couplets, was felt through the eighteenth century and far into the nineteenth, was felt by Macaulay and Motley, as well as by Gibbon, Johnson, and Burke. These authors,

with all their merits, suffer more or less, like other writers of their times, from a tendency to be sonorous rather than simple, to express themselves like a man with a speaking-trumpet at his lips. Until a comparatively recent date, oratorical language was still dominant in newspapers and reviews, as well as on the platform and in the pulpit. Even now there are authors, as well as public speakers, who have, like Daudet's academician, the "parole à son d'ophicléide faite pour les hauteurs de la chaire."

Happily, however, for the English-speaking world, the influence of "The Spectator," of "Gulliver's Travels," and of "Robinson Crusoe," has been strongly felt by succeeding writers. Goldsmith and Sterne, Cobbett and Franklin, carried on the good work begun by the writers of the age of Queen Anne; and

the stream of tendency, in written as in spoken work, now sets towards colloquial, rather than literary or oratorical, English. De Quincey's rhetorical flights —admirable in their way as they are— find more critics than readers nowadays. Even Mr. Ruskin is ashamed—unduly so, perhaps—of the paragraphs in "Modern Painters" which were praised on all hands at their first appearance, and he now writes in a simpler style. Other authors have taken pains, while revising their works, to substitute short, plain words for long and unfamiliar ones.

The reading public has, indeed, so little taste for the pompous or the pedantic that writers who have a weakness for either try to make amends by dropping into slang now and then; but the disposition to copy in books the

faults of conversation is an unfortunate one. In work carefully prepared for the press, vulgarisms which are common in conversation and may be pardoned in hastily written private letters have no excuse. A style may be rapid without being slovenly, plain without being low, and racy without being provincial.

It is clear, too, that lack of method, which is, as we have seen, a merit in conversation and in private letters, cannot but be a defect in all writings which are not intended to reproduce conversation or letters. Those among Addison's Spectators which are least methodical in appearance were evidently written with a definite purpose and on a plan of their own; and they have, therefore, with all their variety, unity of composition: but many of Steele's papers ramble from topic to topic like ordinary conversation; they

are collections of paragraphs rather than essays. Sterne, who to many readers seems to have no method in his mad gambols, assures us that he constantly has the end of his journey in view, and moves towards it all the time, though by a circuitous route. De Quincey, on the other hand, formally announces a subject, and then proceeds to deal with every subject under the sky except or in addition to the one promised,—a fault which renders not a few of his essays, in spite of their brilliancy, irritating as well as unsatisfactory to a reader who is not content with a discourse on matters and things in general. Emerson's want of continuity does not irritate,—that he could not do,—but it saddens and perplexes those who wish to get somewhere, or who feel that there is a limit to their power of assimilating detached Orphic

sayings, however profound in substance and striking in form.

Are there any other particulars in which written should differ from spoken English? Should the production of rhetorical paragraphs, such as De Quincey plumed himself upon, or of "purple patches," such as Macaulay proudly put into his work, be encouraged? Is the style of Gibbon or that of Hume to be preferred? the style of Johnson's "Rambler" or that of Goldsmith's "Citizen of the World?" Ruskin's later style or his earlier one?

George Sand somewhere says that it is as difficult to write in the familiar style in which one talks as it is to write in an ornate and literary style, and that each style has its place. Which, however, should we aim at by preference? Should we strive to write "like a human

being," as Bagehot advises, or should we array our ideas in full dress, as some authors, it is said, do their persons before taking up the pen?

This question has been well answered by an Irish novelist and by a great French critic. "The writing," says Miss Edgeworth, "which has least the appearance of literary manufacture almost always pleases me the best." "S'accoutumer," writes St. Beuve, "à écrire comme on parle et comme on pense, n'est-ce pas déjà se mettre en demeure de bien penser?" In another essay, St. Beuve, after saying that in the writings of Fénelon and Voltaire "all true French rhetoric, natural rhetoric," is to be found, cites with approval a passage from each. "Un auteur qui a trop d'esprit, et qui en veut toujours avoir, disait Fénelon, lasse et épuise le mien: je n'en veux

point avoir tant. S'il en montrait moins, il me laisserait respirer et me ferait plus de plaisir: il me tient trop tendu; la lecture de ses vers me devient une étude. Tant d'éclairs m'éblouissent; je cherche une lumière douce qui soulage mes faibles yeux. Je demande un poëte aimable, proportionné au commun des hommes, qui fasse tout pour eux, et rien pour lui. Je veux un sublime si familier, si doux et si simple, que chacun soit d'abord tenté de croire qu'il l'aurait trouvé sans peine, quoique peu d'hommes soient capable de le trouver. Je préfère l'aimable au surprenant et au merveilleux." The passage quoted from Voltaire chimes in with that from Fénelon: "Le grand art, ce me semble, est de passer du familier à l'héroïque, et de descendre avec des nuances délicates. Malheur à tout ouvrage de ce genre qui

sera toujours sérieux, toujours grand! il ennuiera: ce ne sera qu'une déclamation. Il faut des peintures naïves; il faut de la variété; il faut du simple, de l'élevé, de l'agréable. Je ne dis pas que j'aie tout cela, mais je voudrais bien l'avoir; et celui qui y parviendra sera mon ami et mon maître."

What Fénelon and Voltaire say of verse is at least equally true of prose. The groundwork should be the familiar, the simple, the agreeable. If the sublime, the elevated, the eloquent comes into a piece of prose, it should come in a shape so natural as to lead the reader to imagine that he might have found it himself, should come and should go by easy and gradual steps, as it does with Cardinal Newman and with Thackeray at their best.

The language of books should, then,

be, in the main, the language of conversation; but it should not be that of poor conversation. From this side too, Voltaire utters a wise word of warning. Speaking of Bayle, whose style he terms a journalist's style, he says: "Dans son style toujours clair et naturel, il y a trop de négligence, trop d'oubli de bienséances, trop d'incorrection. Il est diffus: il fait, à la vérité, conversation avec son lecteur comme Montaigne; et en cela il charme tout le monde; mais il s'abandonne a une mollesse de style, et aux expressions triviales d'une conversation trop simple; et en cela il rebute souvent l'homme de goût."

An author who tries to write as he talks should, in fine, be careful to avoid the faults and defects of conversation, while retaining its excellences. In the effort to be natural, he should not suffer

himself to be incorrect or vulgar; in his disdain of the arts of rhetoric, he should not be betrayed into slipshod English: but his purpose should be to write as he talks in his best moments—a purpose not easy to carry out, as every one who has tried is painfully aware, but worth all the trouble it costs. To write as we talk in our best moments is to write simply, naturally, sincerely; to subordinate manner to matter, sound to sense; to abjure exaggeration in every form, intellectual or emotional. Thus, and thus only, will what we write be the exact and complete reproduction of what we think and feel in our sanest and most fruitful moods.

THE END.

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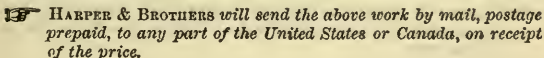

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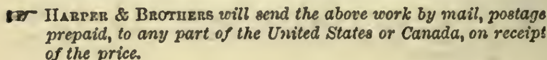

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